

# English Prepositions Over and Above

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UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

**ENGLISH PREPOSITIONS OVER AND ABOVE**

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## **Abstract**

English prepositions have been considered to be as one of the most difficult structures for students to master especially because prepositional systems across languages vary to a considerable degree and bilingual dictionaries offer inadequate portrayal of prepositional semantics (Brala, 2013). A cognitive semantic approach offers insights that could be helpful in a pedagogical context, so the aforementioned approach has been taken into account while presenting the English prepositions *over* and *above* and their distinct senses: Contact Sense (i.e. Covering Sense), Control Sense of *over* and Superior Sense of *above*. Additionally, this paper presents research conducted with the goal of examining whether the students of English language (the second and the third academic year) understand the difference between the English prepositions *above* and *over* in sentences conveying the Contact Sense and the Control Sense and how the English prepositions *above* and *over* are translated into the Croatian language. The results indicate that the participants make more errors in sentences conveying the Contact Sense than the Control Sense. However, a number of alternative mechanisms applied while translating the sentences is higher in the case of sentences conveying the Control Sense. When it comes to the research projects in the future, I would suggest conducting a research that deals with the methods applied while teaching and learning English prepositions in order to hopefully define the factors that will make learning of English prepositions easier and faster.

**Keywords.** English prepositions *over* and *above*, distinct senses, cognitive semantic approach

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## 1. Introduction

In 1998, Elizabeth O'Dowd pointed out that prepositions were among the most difficult, but also the most intriguing forms that students, particularly non-native speakers of English language, have to master while learning the English language. Similarly, Marija Brala-Vukanović claims that “most EFL teachers and students are painfully aware of the fact that when it comes to mastering a foreign language one of the most troublesome areas to learn is the (idiomatic) usage of prepositions.” (Brala, 2013, p. 185). She offers one plausible answer consisting of two parts explaining why this is often the case. Firstly, she says that prepositional systems across languages vary to a considerable degree and secondly, that the portrayal of prepositional semantics in bilingual dictionaries is mostly “inadequate, inaccurate, misleading and replete with mismatched examples“ (cf. Lindstromberg 1998, 2001; Brala 2007 in Brala 2013 ). As a result, the assumption of both ELT grammarians and lexicographers seems to be that the semantics of prepositions are “too complex and unsystematic to warrant thorough investigation either in or out of the classroom.“ (Lindstromberg, 1996, p. 227). Rather, Lindstromberg claims, prepositions are largely to be learned narrow context by narrow context, often phrase by phrase. As a non-native speaker of English language who was grappling (and still intends to continue doing so) with long lists of phrasal verbs, I found myself “in fascination at the richness of P's idiomatic possibilities.“ (O'Dowd, 1998, p.6). Consequently, this B.A. thesis will explore the theoretical background of English prepositions *over* and *above* and their two selected senses (Contact Sense and Control Sense), a cognitive semantic approach to teaching English prepositions and present the research conducted among the second-year and the third-year students of the English language that will be further analyzed below.

## 2.Prepositions and the Cognitive Semantic Approach

In 1998, Boers defined prepositions as polysemous items, which means that they had different, but related senses (p. 198). According to the author, different spatial senses are extended from a central sense (or prototype) in quite systematic ways. He explained that prepositions that were often used to describe a contact relation tend to develop rotated senses. As an example, the author contrasted the difference between the sentences “*The vase is on the table*“ and “*The cloth is over the table*“. He also mentioned that items that typically described a separation relation did not normally develop such rotated senses, which explains why “*he wasn't wearing anything under his coat*“ is acceptable, whereas “*he wasn't wearing anything below his coat*“ is not. Furthermore, Boers claims that figurative senses of a preposition were extended from its spatial ones through conceptual metaphors and that a thorough understanding of the spatial senses helps us to explain why one item rather than another is chosen to express a given metaphor. (Boers, 1998.). More thorough explanations of our ability to extend figurative senses of a preposition from its spatial ones can be found in cognitivists' main concept and idea.

Annette Herskovits (1986) mentions that when it comes to cognition, “we feel certain that our mind holds a representation of the world“ (p.10). Similarly, Brala (2013) argues that in Cognitive Semantics the linguistic structure is a direct reflex of cognition. The major idea in the cognitivists' theory, she claims, is that there is an interrelationship between thought, meaning and linguistic structure. (Brala, 2013).

According to Lakoff (1987), there are two different views present in linguistics: the traditional approach and the new approach. As opposed to the traditional view, the new view “takes imaginative aspects of reason-metaphor, metonymy, and mental imagery-as central to reason, rather than as a peripheral and inconsequential adjunct to the literal“ (Lakoff, 1987). Both

views propose categorization as the main way that we make sense of experience. Categories on the traditional view are characterized solely by the properties shared by their members, which goes against the new approach where our bodily experience and the way we use imaginative mechanisms are central to how we construct categories to make sense of experience. (Lakoff, 1987, p.7).

In accordance with the last statement, categories are then ordered with the best exemplar being more central (i.e. the most central) member of the category, which came to be known as the prototype theory presented by Eleanor Rosch. (Brala;2013,Lakoff;1987, Lindstromberg;1996, Rosch;1975, Tyler, Evans;1999). The mentioned prototype theory may be useful when it comes to learning prepositions. Lindstromberg (1996) cited Brugman's (1981) and Lakoff's (1987) work in which prototype theory was applied in a sustained fashion to the semantics of English prepositions and pointed out that these insights can be useful pedagogically (p.226, 227). For a better understanding of prepositions that will be discussed in the following section, it would be useful to become familiar with one of the major concepts of the cognitivists' idea -perspective. Brala (2013) defines perspective as an issue of point of view, taken in general or with respect to a reference point in the scene and makes a clear difference between the two terms: ground or landmark, which is the reference point and more fixed and figure or trajector, which is the element or entity that is smaller and more movable than the landmark (p.126, 127). As Boers (1998) puts it, “cognitive semantic insights could be helpful in a pedagogical context by tracing the conceptual links between the different senses of a polysemous item, which may help us anticipate comprehension problems.” (p.203)

### **3.The English prepositions *over* and *above***

Before moving on to the theoretical explanation of the English prepositions *over* and *above*, it is crucial to define the following terms: senses and protoscene. Senses, according to Tyler and Evans (1999), “are instantiated in memory, and can be recruited for the process of conceptual integration“, whereas the protoscene “represents a highly idealized abstraction from our rich recurring experience of spatial scenes“ (p.145, 146). According to the above mentioned authors, distinguishing between distinct senses is primarily conceptual in nature, which means that meaning is not a “thing“ but, rather, a “process“. Thus, meaning construction is a dynamic process of conceptualization that reflects the interaction of cultural, communicative, psychological, functional and neuropsychological considerations (Brala, 2013).

#### ***3.1.The English Preposition Over***

Guided by the cognitivists' main concepts and ideas, and the fact that image-schemas are held to be embodied, in the sense that they arise from perceptual reanalysis of recurring patterns in everyday physical experience (Johnson 1987; Mandler 1992, 1996), Tyler and Evans (1999) outlined “principled polysemy framework“ for the semantic network of *over* and they identified 14 distinct senses associated with this preposition. Of these, eight directly involve the TR being located higher than the LM; four involve a TR located on the other side of the LM regarding the vantage point; and three – covering, reflexive, and repetition – involve multiple TR–LM configurations. In this research paper only two senses will be discussed: Contact (i.e. Covering Sense) and Control Sense.

Considering the fact that the earliest meaning of *over* is an important criterion in deciding which sense should be taken as primary, it is crucial to mention that according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), the earliest meaning associated with the form *over* relates to higher than, or above. Protoscene in general consists of a schematic trajector (TR) and a



schematic landmark (LM). In the case of *over*, the TR is conceptualized as being proximate to the LM, so that under certain circumstances, the TR could come into contact with the LM. The functional aspect resulting from this particular spatial configuration is that the LM (or the TR) is conceptualized as being within the sphere of influence of the TR (or the LM). (Tyler, Evans;1999, Dewell 1994, Vandeloise 1991, 1994).

### ***3.2.The Covering Sense ( i.e.Contact Sense ) of Over***

As opposed to the protoscene of *over*, there are instances in the real world in which the object that is in focus (i.e. the TR) is larger or perceived to be larger than the locating object (i.e. the LM) (Tyler, Evans, 2003). This is exactly what happens in sentences that convey the Covering (i.e. Contact Sense) because in such scenarios, Tyler and Evans claim (2003), the vantage point has shifted in a way that the TR is between the LM and the construer and the viewer. In sum, the authors are arguing that the conceptualization constructed in sentences that convey the Covering, i.e. the Contact Sense, involves two changes from the default representation of the proto-scene – first, the TR is perceived as being larger than the LM and second, the vantage point has shifted from off-stage to higher than the TR.

### ***3.3.The English Preposition Above***

The semantic network for *above* contains only four distinct senses. Tyler and Evans (2013) suggest that in a spatial relation such as *over*, which relates to potential contact and hence proximity, there is a greater number of distinct meanings than in the case of a distal relation such as *above*, which (generally) relates to non-contact, and hence distance.

### ***3.4 .The Difference between the English Prepositions Over and Above***

“When there is no contact between the TR and the LM, and the gravity-axis framework is in effect, *over* can be very similar to *above*.” (Dewell,1994,p.31). Tyler and Evans (2003) claim

that many previous accounts suggest that *over* and *above* are synonyms, both of which designate the TR that is higher than the LM. A more specific difference between these two prepositions is explained by Brugman (1981) and Kreitzer (1997) who argue that *above* is typically interpreted as indicating a less specific location than *over*. Furthermore, considering the fact that “there are a plethora of ways in which a spatial scene can be viewed or construed” (Tyler, Evans, 2013, p.111), there is another difference between *over* and *above* relating to the contact between the TR and the LM that will be taken into account in the research part of this B.A. thesis. Tyler and Evans (2013) claim that even though we find that in many instances there is no contact between the TR and the LM in spatial scenes involving *over* and that the spatial scenes described by *above* do not allow contact between the TR and the LM, the basis of the choice seems to hinge on how the speaker construes the physical distance between the TR and the LM.

### ***3.5.The Control Sense of Over and the Superior Sense of Above***

The Control Sense of *over* is associated with vertical elevation and the phenomenon of control and power. Because of the experiential association between control and being vertically elevated, there is an implicature of control associated with *over*. (Tyler, Evans, 2013).

The Superior Sense of *above*, on the other hand, is generally considered to be positive and suggests the concept of great distance. (Tyler, Evans, 2013). The Superior Sense, according to the mentioned authors, also involves an individual’s relative status within a hierarchical organization such as a company or a social system. In that case, a control reading of sentences conveying the Superior Sense is excluded. Tyler and Evans (1999) claim that while both *over* and *above* designate spatial relations which are higher than, only *over* also designates the functional relation of influence, precisely because part of its spatial configuration involves the notion of potential contact between the TR and LM.

## **4. Research**

Research was conducted in order to determine how students of English language (the second and the third academic year) understand the difference between the English prepositions *above* and *over* in sentences and how the English prepositions *above* and *over* are translated into the Croatian language. The prepositions are used in sentences in the Contact and the Control Sense. The sentences that were included in the test were extracted from various research papers on the English prepositions *above* and *over* and then adjusted to different content in order to be more suitable for research purposes. The results of the research should show whether the students of English language understand the difference between the English prepositions *above* and *over* and which Croatian translations for the prepositions are most frequently used.

The most common errors in the use of the prepositions and the most common translations for the prepositions were determined on the basis of research results and then further analyzed to provide an explanation for the errors made by the students.

## **5. Hypotheses**

H1: The participants make more errors in sentences in which the prepositions are used in the Control Sense.

H2: The Croatian translations of the English prepositions *above* and *over* that relate to the Contact and the Control Sense are *iznad* and *nad*.

## **6. Methodology**

In this research, students at undergraduate level were chosen as subjects. Thirty six undergraduate students were chosen randomly and they filled in the test. All the subjects were

second- and third-year students majoring in English Language and Literature. The participants have been studying the English language since the elementary school.

The test included sentences that needed to be translated and sentences with gaps that needed to be filled in with the appropriate prepositions that express the Contact Sense and the Control Sense. The choice of using this type of test was based on the fact that while filling out the test, the participants do not only remember the preposition but also analyse its use in a sentence. The test was evaluated by allocating one point for each correct answer in the test. The test consisted of two parts, each for every sense that was mentioned above.

### **6.1.Data Analysis**

A frequency count was first carried out of the various instances where prepositions were used, whether correctly or incorrectly. The correct use of prepositions was labelled as a correct answer. On the other hand, the use of inappropriate prepositions was considered to be an incorrect answer, as shown in the framework of the analysis as in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Framework of data analysis

Prepositions	Correct Answers	
	2nd Year	3rd Year
Contact Sense	494	266
Control Sense	344	193
	Incorrect Answers	
	2nd Year	3rd Year
Contact Sense	81	59
Control Sense	47	28

To examine the accuracy of the production of prepositions, the percentages of errors in the use of prepositions were compared. The errors were analyzed by the type of prepositions with a major emphasis on the sense in which the preposition was used. Such analysis was carried out for all prepositions in the test (see Appendix) and the process was repeated for each test.

To determine the most common source of errors, the different types of errors made by the undergraduate students with various prepositions were identified. The frequencies of errors for each type of error were determined. Attempts were also made to identify any alternative mechanisms employed by the undergraduate students in place of prepositions in the translation tasks, and these were further analyzed.

## **7.Results and Discussion**

As stated earlier, the present study analyzed the errors committed by the students in sentences in which the prepositions were used in the Contact Sense and the Control Sense. The study was a quantitative, in-depth enquiry as the interpretation of the tests collected from the undergraduate students to find out reasons for mistakes and overcome the problems in the use of the prepositions. The students had more difficulties with the proper use of the prepositions *above* and *over* when they conveyed the Contact Sense as opposed to the Control Sense, which goes against the H1 stated above. Among the second-year students, there were 81 (14%) errors in the sentences conveying the Contact Sense and 47 (12 %) errors in the sentences conveying the Control Sense. Similarly to the second-year students, the third-year students made more errors in the sentences conveying the Contact Sense. There were 59 (18.15%) errors in the sentences relating to the Contact Sense and only 28 (12.66%) errors in the sentences relating to the Control Sense. The prepositions were familiar to the students, but it was difficult for them to place them properly in the sentences.

Table 2. illustrates student errors in the tasks in which they had to choose between the English prepositions *above* and *over* in the given sentences. Out of the total 36 respondents, 64% were second-year students and 36% were third-year students majoring in English Language and Literature.

Table 2. Student errors

Second-year students					
	First task (15 sentences)	Third task (10 sentences)	Fourth task (7 sentences)	Sixth task (10 sentences)	Total
	Contact Sense		Control Sense		
Number of incorrect answers	61	20	37	10	128
Third-year students					
	First task (15 sentences)	Third task (10 sentences)	Fourth task (7 sentences)	Sixth task (10 sentences)	Total
	Contact Sense		Control Sense		
Number of incorrect answers	42	17	19	9	87

Among all the answers of the second-year students, there were 61 (17.68 %) errors in the first task. The highest number of committed errors was found in the thirteenth and the fourteenth sentence. The number of errors in the thirteenth sentence was 22 (95.65 %) and in the fourteenth it was 11 (47.8 %). The explanation for such a high number of errors can be linked

to Tyler and Evans's claim that more than one functional element or a cluster of functional elements may be associated with a proto-scene. They claim that we contrast instances of *over* and *above* in sentences such as the following:

1. a. *The cross-country skier skimmed **over** the snow.*

b. *The cross-country skier skimmed **above** the snow.*

According to the mentioned authors, native speakers tend to find (1.a) perfectly acceptable, while they find (1.b) anomalous. Sentences that were problematic for the undergraduate students were the following: “*The portrait is over the mantel.*“ and “*The bee is hovering over the flower.*“ In the sentences of this type, the TR (trajectory) is vaguely located in relation to the LM (landmark), which is why the undergraduate students probably chose the preposition *above* instead of *over*. They concluded that the TR was higher than but not in potential reach of the LM, “the vagueness of location, which was denoted by somewhere, implied that the TR is not within the LM’s (us) sphere of influence.“ ( Tyler, Evans, p 66 ).

Another possible explanation for such results may be connected to the fact that the normal interpretation of utterances does not derive only from information coded by the utterance but also involves humans drawing rational inferences based not only on what is uttered (the linguistic production), but additionally on the surrounding context, knowledge of speakers’ intentions and knowledge of speakers’ beliefs, including beliefs about how the world works (Green;1989, Grice;1975;1978, Reddy;1979). The interpretation of the students' results for the third task shows that in sentences where both *over* and *above* would be acceptable, most of the students chose only one possible answer. The sentences were the following:

*The cross-country skier skimmed **over/above** the snow.*

*Someone drew the line on the paper and I added a few circles **over/above** it.*

In these sentences, there was no obvious contact between the TR and the LM so most of the students circled only *above* as the correct answer. Only 5 second-year students (21.7%) and 3 third-year students (23.07%) recognised that both *over* and *above* were acceptable in these sentences. In the sentences where the contact was obvious (e.g. “*Peter nailed a board over the hole in the wall.*“, “*The dancers were waltzing over the floor.*“), second-year students made only 3 (13%) errors and third-year students only 2 (15.38%), which confirms that the students associate the English preposition *over* strictly with the Covering Sense. Even though there was no (obvious) contact in the sentences, the protoscene implied a “close“ relation between the TR and the LM, which should have been enough to recognise the contrast between *over* and *above* (Dewell, 1994).

In the third task, second-year students gave fewer inappropriate responses with only 20 (8,69%) errors.

Second-year students made 37 (22.98 %) errors in the fourth task. The highest number of committed errors include the first and the fifth sentence. In the first sentence, second-year students made 12 (52.17 %) errors and in the fifth sentence 20 (86.95 %) errors. According to Tyler and Evans (2003), the Control Sense of *over* “ is due to an implicature which arose from an independently motivated experiential correlation between control and vertical elevation, that eventually became conventionally associated with *over*“ (p 101). They claim that when one person has been in physical control of another person, control has been experienced as the controller being physically higher. Thus, in physical terms, Tyler and Evans claim (2003), the victor or controller is often the one who finishes standing, in the upright position; the loser finishes on the ground, physically lower than the controller. Similarly, in experiential terms, control and vertical elevation are correlated. Tyler and Evans (2003) suggest that “due to an independently motivated experiential association between control and being vertically elevated, there is an implicature of control associated with *over*“ (p,102). On the other hand,



the English preposition *above* is connected to the Superior Sense. The preposition *above* is used in a positive context and its aspect involves an individual's relative status within a hierarchical organization such as a company or a social system where someone is at a distance and is less likely to affect other person directly. (Tyler, Evans). As can be seen from the students' results, both the second-year and the third-year students (see the third-year students' results below) had problems with the following sentences:

*The fight ended and Peter stood **over** John breathing heavily.*

*I have to answer directly to my supervisor who is **over** me in the company.*

It can be suggested that in the first sentence, the students failed to interpret the element of control that was present when someone was physically higher than that which was controlled. Instead, the students were probably focused on the vertical elevation only, which was why they chose the English preposition *above*.

In terms of the second sentence (*I have to answer directly to my supervisor who is **over** me in the company.*), it is possible to infer that the students failed to notice the element of distance that is crucial for understanding the difference between this sentence and the one that came after it in the test: *I have never spoken to my chief executive who is **above** me in the company.* The words “*answer directly*“ should have directed the students towards recognising the sense of control present in the sentence. The interpretation of the students' results showed that the students were not familiar with the difference between the Control Sense of *over* and the Superior Sense of *above* in the aforementioned sentences. However, both second-year and third-year students recognised the sense of control in the second and third sentence in that task:

*She has authority **over** marketing.*

*Interestingly, the Prime Minister has more influence **over** the law than the President  
itself.*

In these sentences, neither second-year and third-year students made any mistakes. The explanation for such a high number of correct answers may be found in the fact that in these sentences, the element of control was better emphasized because of the use of the words “*authority*“ and “*influence*“ and government titles such as the “*President*“ and “*Prime Minister*“ that students immediately associated to control due to their prior knowledge about these terms.

In the sixth task, second-year students made fewer inappropriate responses with only 10 (4,34%) errors.

When it comes to third-year students, there were 42 (21.5%) errors in the first task. The highest number of committed errors was also in the thirteenth and the fourteenth sentence. The number of errors in the thirteenth sentence was 10 (76.92 %) and in the fourteenth it was 7 (53.84 %).

In the third task, third-year students gave fewer inappropriate responses with only 17 (13%) errors.

Third-year students made 19 (20.8 %) errors in the fourth task. The highest number of committed errors was in the first sentence where third-year students made 12 (92.3%) errors.

In the sixth task, third-year students gave fewer inappropriate responses with only 9 (6.92%) errors.

The test used as an instrument for this research included tasks with sentences that needed to be translated from the English language into the Croatian language. The second task included five sentences concerning the Contact Sense and the fifth task included four sentences that contained the prepositions conveying the Control Sense. Table 3. illustrates the subjects' performance in translating English prepositions *above* and *over*.

Table 3. Subjects' performance in translating English prepositions *above* and *over*:

Sentences ( Contact Sense )	Translations	Frequencies	
		Second-year students	Third-year students
Her room is above mine.	Njezina soba je iznad moje.	23	13
They put a plastic sheet over a painted ceiling.	Stavili su plastičnu foliju preko obojenog stropa.	18	10
	Stavili su plastičnu foliju na obojani strop.	5	0
	Plastičnom folijom prekrili su obojani strop.	0	3
The sun is above the garden in the afternoon.	Sunce je iznad vrta u popodnevnim satima.	19	12
	Sunce je nad vrtom u popodnevnim satima.	4	1
The sun over the garden shines like a diamond.	Sunce nad vrtom sjaji se poput dijamanta.	15	0
	Sunce iznad vrta sjaji se	4	13

	poput dijamanta.		
	Sunce baca sjaj na vrt poput dijamanta.	2	0
	Sunce obasjava vrt poput dijamanta.	2	0
I usually wear a sweater over my shirt.	Uglavnom nosim džemper preko majice.	23	13
Sentences ( Control Sense )	Translations	Frequencies	
		Second-year students	Third-year students
She has authority over the whole class.	Ima autoritet nad cijelim razredom.	22	12
	Ona je autoritet cijelom razredu.	1	1
Her influence over the design of this company's web site was too obvious.	Njezin utjecaj nad dizajnom internet stranice ove tvrtke bio je previše očit.	0	4
	Njezin utjecaj na dizajn internet stranice ove tvrtke bio je previše očit.	22	9
	Njezin utjecaj oko dizajna internet stranice ove tvrtke bio je previše očit.	1	0
My brother is above me when it comes to success in school.	Moj brat je iznad mene kada je riječ o uspjehu u školi.	8	4

	Moj brat je bolji od mene kada je riječ o uspjehu u školi.	14	9
	Moj brat je ispred mene kada je riječ o uspjehu u školi.	1	0
Considering the time I have invested in my education, I should have been above all in this company.	S obzirom na vrijeme koje sam uložila u obrazovanje, trebala bih biti iznad svih u ovoj firmi.	16	10
	S obzirom na vrijeme koje sam uložila u obrazovanje, trebala bih biti pozicionirana bolje od svih u ovoj firmi.	1	1
	S obzirom na vrijeme koje sam uložila u obrazovanje, trebala bih biti na višoj poziciji u ovoj firmi.	2	1
	S obzirom na vrijeme koje sam uložila u obrazovanje, trebala bih biti naprednija od svih u ovoj firmi.	0	1
	S obzirom na vrijeme koje sam uložila u obrazovanje, trebala bih biti nadređena svima u ovoj firmi.	2	0

	S obzirom na vrijeme koje sam uložila u obrazovanje, trebala bih biti bolja od ostalih u ovoj firmi.	2	0
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With respect to second-year students' responses, it was found that students used 46 (50%) alternative translations while translating sentences that convey the Control Sense and did not make any errors while translating the sentences. The students gave only 5 (4.35%) incorrect translations while translating sentences that convey the Contact Sense. A total of 22 (95.65%) second-year students avoided using the direct Croatian counterpart while translating the sentence “ *Her influence over the design of this company's web site was too obvious.*“ in the fifth task. Instead of using the Croatian preposition “*nad*“, the second-year students translated the English preposition *over* by using the Croatian preposition “*na*“, which is an acceptable translation for that sentence in the Croatian language.

According to the results, the number of alternative mechanisms employed while translating the sentences was higher in the sentences conveying the Control Sense than in the sentences conveying the Contact Sense. The number of alternative mechanisms employed in the sentences conveying the Control Sense was 46 (50%) as opposed to 4 (3.48%) alternative mechanisms employed in the sentences conveying the Contact Sense. In order to find out the reason why the students chose to employ the alternative mechanisms and avoid the direct use of the Croatian counterpart in sentences that convey the Control Sense, some students were post-interviewed. The reasons they mentioned can be summed up in the following way: not being familiar with the correct Croatian counterpart when *over* and *above* are not used to define spatial distance and wanting to adjust the translation to the common structures in the Croatian language. Furthermore, based on the interpretation of the students' translations, it is

possible to assume that the students wanted to avoid the word-for-word method and use the sense-for-sense<sup>1</sup> method instead, especially in the sentences where *over* and *above* conveyed the Control Sense whose meaning, according to Tyler and Evans (2003), could not be derived from the context.

Four alternative mechanisms that were employed for the sentence “*The sun over the garden shines like a diamond*“ that conveys the Contact Sense were verb “*obasjava*“ and verb+object “*baca sjaj*“.

The number of alternative mechanisms employed by the second-year students in the sentences that convey the Control Sense was the highest in the last two sentences in the fifth task: “*My brother is above me when it comes to success in school.*“ and “*Considering the time I have invested in my education, I should have been above all in this company.*“ Among the second-year students' responses, there were 22 (47.82% ) alternative phrases that were used for these sentences. For the sentence “*My brother is above me when it comes to success in school.*“, 60% of all second-year students used the phrase “*bolji od mene*“ instead of the Croatian preposition “*iznad*“. The sentence „*Considering the time I have invested in my education, I should have been above all in this company.*“ was translated by using the following phrases: “*pozicionirana bolje od svih*“, “*na višoj poziciji*“, “*nadređena svima and bolja od ostalih*“.

Compared with the second-year students, the third-year students employed fewer alternative mechanisms for the sentences in the fifth task. The number of alternative mechanisms employed was 22, which is 42.3 % of all students' responses for the fifth task. A total of 12 (54.54%) alternative mechanisms was employed by the third-year students in the case of the last two sentences in the fifth task: “*My brother is above me when it comes to success in school.*“ and “*Considering the time I have invested in my education, I should have been above*

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Munday (2001) in *Introducing Translational Studies (Theories and applications)* pointed out the difference between literal (word-for-word method) and free (sense-for-sense method) approaches to translation. The sense-for-sense approach, allowed the sense or content of the ST (source text) to be translated.

*all in this company.*“ In addition to the alternative mechanisms in the form of phrases employed by the second-year students, the third-year students added one more alternative response concerning the sentence “*Considering the time I have invested in my education, I should have been above all in this company.*“, which was translated by using the Croatian phrase “*naprednija od svih*“ instead of the Croatian preposition *iznad*. The reason behind this high percentage of alternative translations employed by the students may be connected to Lefevere's claim, which was elaborated in Munday's *Introducing Translational Studies Theories and applications* (2001). Lefevere claims that the “ basic process of rewriting is at work in translation, historiography, anthologization, criticism, and editing.“ (p,128) According to this statement, one could assume that the students wanted to improve the original sentence by conforming it to the expected conventions in the Croatian language. By doing so, the best solution for them at that point was to avoid the use of the Croatian counterpart *iznad* and use the phrase they considered to be the best solution. However, the result of using the mentioned phrases, particularly in the case of the sentence “*Considering the time I have invested in my education, I should have been above all in this company.*“, brought about translations that changed the original meaning of the sentence. The use of the phrases “*na višoj poziciji*“ and “*pozicionirana bolje od ostalih*“ implies that someone should have been promoted but excludes the possibility of getting the position that is the highest of all in that company. Furthermore, the use of the phrases “*bolja od ostalih*“ and “*naprednija od svih*“ puts focus on someone's ability instead of someone's position. Finally, the use of the phrase “*nadređena svima*“ emphasizes the sense of control that was intended to be avoided by the use of the English preposition *above*.

Similarly, alternative solutions for the sentence “*The sun over the garden shines like a diamond*“ that include the verb “*obasjava*“ and verb+object “*baca sjaj*“ also changed the meaning. While reading the original sentence, the image implies the sun and the garden as



being in the vertical position and that the time is probably around noon because according to Tyler and Evans (2003), *over* crucially involves vertical axis. The translations, on the other hand, add the possibility that the scene is set in the afternoon when sun is about to set down.

In terms of the Contact Sense, alternative answers that are both acceptable in the Croatian language and convey the meaning of the English preposition *over* refer to the following sentences: “*Her influence over the design of this company's web site was too obvious.*“, “*She has authority over the whole class.*“ and “*They put a plastic sheet over a painted ceiling*“. The first sentence was translated by using the Croatian preposition “*na*“, which is an acceptable translation for that sentence in the Croatian language even though the direct Croatian counterpart was avoided. In the second sentence, the students avoided the direct Croatian counterpart of *over* again and ended up with the following structure: “*Ona je autoritet cijelom razredu*“. In this case, authority is not presented as something that is possessed. Instead, the word authority functions as the subject complement, which does not change the meaning of the original sentence. In the third sentence, the students also avoided using the direct Croatian counterpart of *over* by translating the English verb “*put*“ by the Croatian verb “*prekirili*“ that already implies the action of putting the sheet and the Covering Sense.

As can be seen in Table 3., students also used the Croatian preposition “*na*“ while translating this sentence (21.73% of the second-year students chose this solution). This may be linked to Dewell's (1994) “shifting perspectives“ that tend to increase our “subjective involvement“, which means that every spatial scene is conceptualized from a particular vantage point. Similarly, Tyler and Evans (1999) claim that the same scene could be construed in a different way, which is why in a spatial scene in which a large cloth is positioned in relation to a table such that the cloth covers the top of the table, the scene can be construed by focusing on contact between the cloth and the table as was the case with 21.73% of second-year students.

Among second-year students, there were 98 (85.22%) correct translations in the second task conveying the Contact Sense and 46 (50%) correct translations in the fifth task conveying the Control Sense.

Among third-year students, there were 48 (73.84 %) correct translations in the second task conveying the Contact Sense and 30 (57.7 %) correct translations in the fifth task conveying the Control Sense. As can be seen in Table 3., second-year and third-year students' performance was more efficient in the sentences concerning the Contact Sense than in the sentences concerning the Control Sense.

## **8. Conclusion**

The aim of this paper was to shed light on whether the students of English language (the second and the third academic year) understand the difference between the English prepositions *above* and *over* in sentences and how the English prepositions *above* and *over* are translated into the Croatian language. The results have revealed that prepositional errors are more common in sentences that convey the Contact Sense as opposed to prepositional errors in sentences that convey the Control Sense, which goes against the original hypothesis where it was proposed that the participants would make more errors in sentences in which prepositions are used in the Control Sense. The interpretation of students' results has shown that the prepositional errors committed in sentences conveying the Contact Sense can be linked to non-obvious (unclear) contact between the TR and the LM. In the sentences of this type, the participants chose the English preposition *above* rather than the English preposition *over*. When it comes to the sentences conveying the Control Sense of *over* and the Superior Sense of *above*, the interpretation of the prepositional errors the participants have committed has revealed that the students focused only on vertical elevation instead on the distinct but related senses of both *over* and *above*. Furthermore, the participants have also failed to

interpret the difference between *over* and *above* when it comes to the element of distance within a hierarchical organization such as a company or a social system. The interpretation of tasks where the participants had to translate the sentences from the English language into the Croatian language has confirmed the second hypothesis where it is stated that the Croatian translations of the English prepositions *above* and *over* that relate to the Contact and the Control Sense are *iznad* and *nad*. Interestingly, the results have revealed a high percentage of alternative mechanisms employed by the participants while translating. However, the resulting effects of some translational solutions were sentences whose meanings do not match with the original ones.

Although the present paper has provided an insight into the most common prepositional errors committed by the participants and possible reasons behind them, it also has some limitations. The most evident limitation is the sample. The number of participants is limited and therefore generalizations cannot be made. Furthermore, other possible intervening factors such as the L2 exposure have not been considered in this study.

It would be interesting for further research on this issue to examine whether students have learned English prepositions in accordance to the collocationist view or have adopted another method (e.g. Lindstromberg's approach) in order to find a better explanation for their prepositional errors. Such a study could also combine the best of the existing approaches and suggest pedagogical (including lexicographic) applications and benefits required for teaching and learning a wide range of the uses of prepositions generally.

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## 10. Appendix

Test

Academic Year \_\_\_\_\_

### Write *above* or *over*:

My friend lay with the magazine \_\_\_\_\_ her face.

As a magician, he managed to lay with a magazine \_\_\_\_\_ his face.

The cloud is directly \_\_\_\_\_ our heads.

I see blue sky through the skylight \_\_\_\_\_ me.

The bride wore a white veil \_\_\_\_\_ her face.

The bedlinen was neatly placed \_\_\_\_\_ the bed.

He threw a blanket \_\_\_\_\_ her.

She always wears her blue jacket \_\_\_\_\_ her shirt during the winter.

He put his hand \_\_\_\_\_ my mouth because I was talking too much.

The roof \_\_\_\_\_ him was pretty high.

After the show, we could see a display of fireworks \_\_\_\_\_ the park.

We live in a cottage \_\_\_\_\_ this valley.

The portrait is \_\_\_\_\_ the mantel.

The bee is hovering \_\_\_\_\_ the flower.

The tree is leaning \_\_\_\_\_ the lake.

### Translate these sentences:

Her room is above mine.

They put a plastic sheet over a painted ceiling.

The sun is above the garden in the afternoon.

The sun over the garden shines like a diamond.

I usually wear a sweater over my shirt.

**Circle *above* , *over* or *both*:**

The birds are somewhere \_\_\_\_\_ us. A) over B) above

The cross-country skier skimmed \_\_\_\_\_ the snow. A) over B) above

Peter nailed a board \_\_\_\_\_ the hole in the wall. A) over B) above

She put her white coat \_\_\_\_\_ the chair. A) over B) above

Someone drew the line on the paper and I added a few circles \_\_\_\_\_ it. A) over B) above

Open the box \_\_\_\_\_ the pink one. A) over B) above

The dancers were waltzing \_\_\_\_\_ the floor. A) over B) above

The waves came up \_\_\_\_\_ her head. A) over B) above

She held an umbrella \_\_\_\_\_ her head when it started raining. A) over B) above

In that old Gothic house, I felt that spirits of the past are beyond me and \_\_\_\_\_ me. A) over  
B) above

**Write *over* or *above***

The fight ended and Peter stood \_\_\_\_\_ John breathing heavily.

She has authority \_\_\_\_\_ marketing.

Interestingly, the Prime Minister has more influence \_\_\_\_\_ the law than the  
President itself.

Mary's intellectual expertise is well \_\_\_\_\_ the other judges in her district.

I have to answer directly to my supervisor who is \_\_\_\_\_ me in the company.

I have never spoken to my chief executive who is \_\_\_\_\_ me in the company.



My co-workers often have petty comments about my clothes. I decided to rise \_\_\_\_\_ their comments.

**Translate these sentences.**

She has authority over the whole class.

Her influence over the design of this company's web site was too obvious.

My brother is above me when it comes to success in school.

Considering the time I have invested in my education, I should have been above all in this company.

**Circle *above* , *over* or *both*:**

I resent her being so authoritative \_\_\_\_\_ her daughter. A) over B) above

The bully stood \_\_\_\_\_ him and threatened. A) over B) above

I am not allowed to do anything on my own. My boyfriend has a complete control \_\_\_\_\_ me. A) over B) above

Chief executive is the most serious corporate in charge of managing an organization. He is \_\_\_\_\_ all other workers. A) over B) above

He has a strange power \_\_\_\_\_ me. A) over B) above

Unfortunately, theoretical knowledge has more influence \_\_\_\_\_ getting a job than practical knowledge . A) over B) above

Her intelligence is way \_\_\_\_\_ ours. It is out of reach for all of us. A) over B) above

A woman' s dominance \_\_\_\_\_ a man is hardly seen nowadays. A) over B) above

His rule \_\_\_\_\_ the citizens was harsh and cruel. A) over B) above

King's appearance was so powerful that he rose \_\_\_\_\_ all emperors at the ceremony. A) over B) above



