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Prepositions in the Selected Nursery Rhymes: A Corpus Based Analytical Study

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Abstract:

This work entitled “Prepositions in the selected nursery rhymes: A Corpus based analytical study” is a linguistic analysis of children’s English nursery rhymes. This study is based on the analysis made using the select nursery rhymes specifically for this work. The nursery rhymes are analyzed from the grammatical point of view, with the emphasis on prepositions as one of the lexical levels of language analysis. Apart from which, this study deals with the frequency of prepositions from the select nursery rhymes for the feasibility of learning prepositions through nursery rhymes. The tool used for finding out the frequency list is *compleatlexutor*, an online tool for corpus related studies.

Keywords: Corpus, Prepositions, Language development, CPH.

Introduction

The lyrics of Nursery Rhymes are very important. “Fashions come and go, but children still repeat the favourite and famous old nursery rhymes” (The secret history of nursery rhymes). When parents recite old nursery rhymes to their children, they provide them with the first important step to education in their lives. The way in which a child learns to speak is through the language chunks. Nursery rhymes play a major role in learning a language. Through the chunks that are available in the nursery rhymes, it is very easy for a child to learn language.

Review of Literature

According to Tony Stead (2005), listening comprehension precedes reading comprehension. Continuing to agree with his claims, in order for a child to understand what they are reading, they have to hear the language first. He also continues to say that a lot of traditional rhymes such as ‘Jack and Jill’, ‘Humpty Dumpty’ etc. were repetitions and allowed us to memorize basic structures and patterns in English language. It is thus important for young children to learn rhymes as they play a vital role in language learning and acquisition. Research shows that rhymes are very important in developing the lexical and phonemic awareness in children, says Alderman.

As children recite nursery rhymes, they start learning new vocabulary and learn how to articulate words. Agreeing with Beatriz Becerra where she explored the use of rhymes and songs in the teaching of English as a second language to the primary school children. She agrees with Lennenberg (1967) and his very important critical period hypothesis (CPH) and says that they can absorb much of second language because of its possible and entertaining way, rhymes work as enriching linguistic input by and large for children.

The study of Dowling (1999), demonstrated the major modes of music, where music make subjects i.e. the learners feel happy and minor ones makes listeners sad. Nursery rhymes

are major modes of music and encourage children's happiness and well-being, creating a positive and pleasant atmosphere in classroom which makes a favourable learning in the context of English language teaching.

Agreeing with Sadlier and Zuralski (2000 & 2005), nursery rhymes experiences and knowledge are considered to be the important precursors and determinants of an individual's later literacy abilities.

Najat Ismael Sayakhan and Darcy H Bradley (2014) a rationale and offer suggestions for how nursery rhymes are used as materials to teach English in EFL classroom. It also shares how teachers might use rhymes for their training to enhance English language teaching.

Pinker (2002) averred that there is a strong relationship between humanity and music and rhymes. Rhymes and music play a major role in the psychological development of children. Children start learning with the rhymes.

Iva Kropouva, on linguistic aspects of nursery rhymes from the Masaryk University analysed the children English nursery rhymes based on a corpus with nursery rhymes which was created especially for the research purpose. The nursery rhymes are analysed from the linguistic point of view, with the emphasis on the levels of language analysis. KeerthiKurian published an article in *coastaldigest.com* where she says how nursery rhymes are effective in its medium to teach the beginners of English language learners.

There are strong research evidences that proved the relationship between the children learning nursery rhymes and the later cognitive development in reading and vocabulary skills.

Research shows that English nursery rhymes enhance extensive early literacy skills in children which include oral language, phonemic awareness, vocabulary etc. The teaching of nursery rhymes include pattern similar to that of ongoing conversation in English. Although many words in nursery rhymes are not used in daily conversation, the way they are taught arouses interest in children to learn unknown words. It is with the nursery rhymes most of us started learning the language. It is because of them we still somewhere in our mental ability we could identify some grammatical structures, rhythmic patterns etc. This aroused the interest to analyze the nursery rhymes to understand the crucial role that it played/plays in an individual's language development process.

Methodology

Aim of the study

This study primarily aims to explore the feasibility of learning prepositions through nursery rhymes. This study also tries to explore the frequency of the prepositions in the selected nursery rhymes. According to M Fox (2001), "Experts in literary and child development have discovered that if children know eight nursery rhymes by heart the time they are four years old, they are usually among the best readers by the time that they are eight". What the study aims to find out is the number of prepositions' occurrence among the total number of words of the selected nursery rhymes.

Hypothesis

This study examines one of the grammatical aspects of the chosen nursery rhymes i.e. preposition. It is assumed that the children are very interested in the nursery rhymes. Based on

the assumptions made, it is hypothesized that the high frequency of prepositions in the nursery rhymes helps to teach prepositions to the learners in a better way.

Materials used

A random collection of nursery rhymes were taken and they were classified into seven distinct types with five nursery rhymes each.

For the convenience of the study, the chosen nursery rhymes are classified under seven different topics based on their themes. Each topic accounts in five nursery rhymes. The seven classified types of the nursery rhymes used for the study are the following:

- 1) About transport a) *The wheels on the bus*, b) *Theskye boat song*, c) *Sailing, sailing*, d) *Row, row, row your boat* and e) *London bridge is falling down*.
- 2) About body a) *Baby, bumble bee*, b) *Brush, brush, brush your teeth*, c) *Chubby cheeks* d) *Hand washing* and e) *Head, shoulders, knees and toes*.
- 3) About food a) *Betty Botter bought some butter*, b) *Blow wind blow*, c) *Five fat sausages*, d) *Hot cross buns* and e) *I'm a little teapot*.
- 4) About alphabets, numbers and counting a) *A, you are adorable*, b) *ABC song*, c) *One, two, three, four, five*, d) *One two buckle my shoes* and e) *Ten in a bed*.
- 5) About flowers and nature a) *Girls and boys come out to play*, b) *I love the mountains*, c) *Lavender's blue*, d) *The mulberry bus* and e) *Ring a ring O' roses*.
- 6) About animals a) *A wise old owl*, b) *All the pretty little horses*, c) *Baa baa black sheep*, d) *Hickory dickory dock* and e) *Pussy cat pussy cat*
- 7) About lullabies a) *Early to bed*, b) *Hush, little baby*, c) *Cradle song*, d) *Brahm's lullaby* and e) *Early to bed*.

The chosen nursery rhymes are taken in a word file and were fed in a computer. The frequency list of the nursery rhymes of each category is taken separately. From the word list, the prepositions are selected and their frequency is taken into consideration for the purpose of the study. Later, frequency list of prepositions in all the topics are compared for the further purpose of this study.

Analysis

The chosen nursery rhymes are fed in a computer for a quantitative analysis. The lexical items of the selected nursery rhymes are analyzed quantitatively by taking the word frequency list using the online corpus analyzing tool *Compleatlexutor*. Each category of nursery rhymes' word list is analyzed separately. For the examining purpose of the study, the occurrence of prepositions in each category is selected.

By analyzing them using the online corpus analyzing tool, the number of 'Types' and 'Tokens' are taken. (Types are the total number of words i.e. word-forms. Tokens are the total number of occurrences of Types i.e. occurrences of word-forms).

- Nursery rhymes related to *Transport*. Types : Tokens ; 161 : 604.

There are 161 types and 604 tokens in the selected nursery rhymes under the category **Transport**. From these types and tokens, only the prepositions are taken into consideration. Here is a figure which shows the occurrences of prepositions in the selected nursery rhymes under this category.

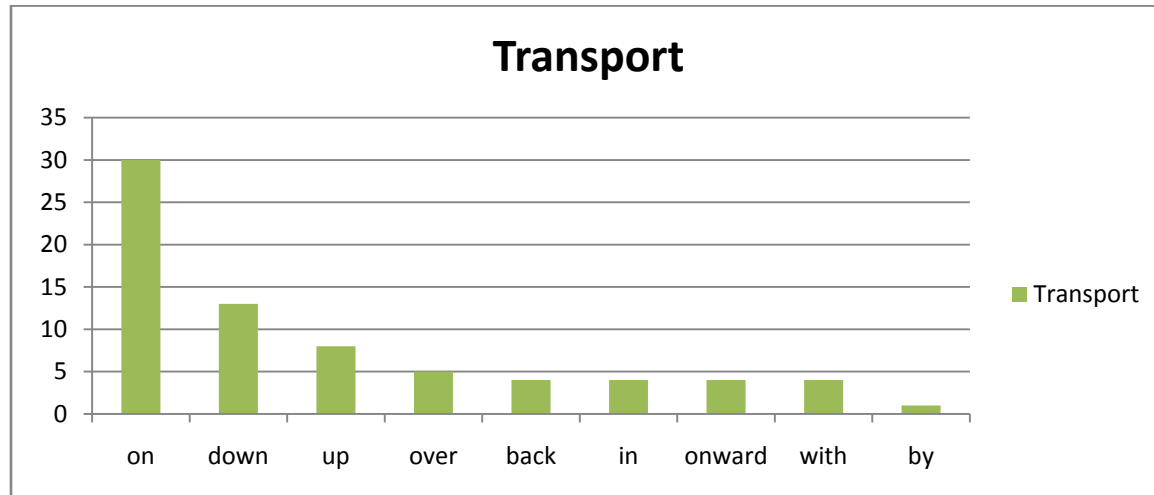


Figure 1: Tokens of prepositions in the selected five nursery rhymes under the category 'Transport'.

Among the 161 words that are used in the five selected nursery rhymes, the number of prepositions is only nine. They are *on*, *down*, *up*, *over*, *back*, *in*, *onward*, *with* and *by*. The total number of occurrences of these prepositions among the 604 tokens is 73. The figure 1 shows the occurrences of these prepositions i.e. *on* have occurred 30 times; *down* for 13 times; *up* for 8 times; *over* for 5 times; *back* for 4 times; *in* for 4 times; *onward* for 4 times; *with* for 4 times and *by* once.

- Nursery rhymes related to *Body*. Types : Tokens ; 89 : 243.

There are 89 types and 243 tokens in the selected nursery rhymes under the category **Body**. From these types and tokens, only the prepositions are taken into consideration. Here is a figure which shows the occurrences of prepositions in the selected nursery rhymes under this category.

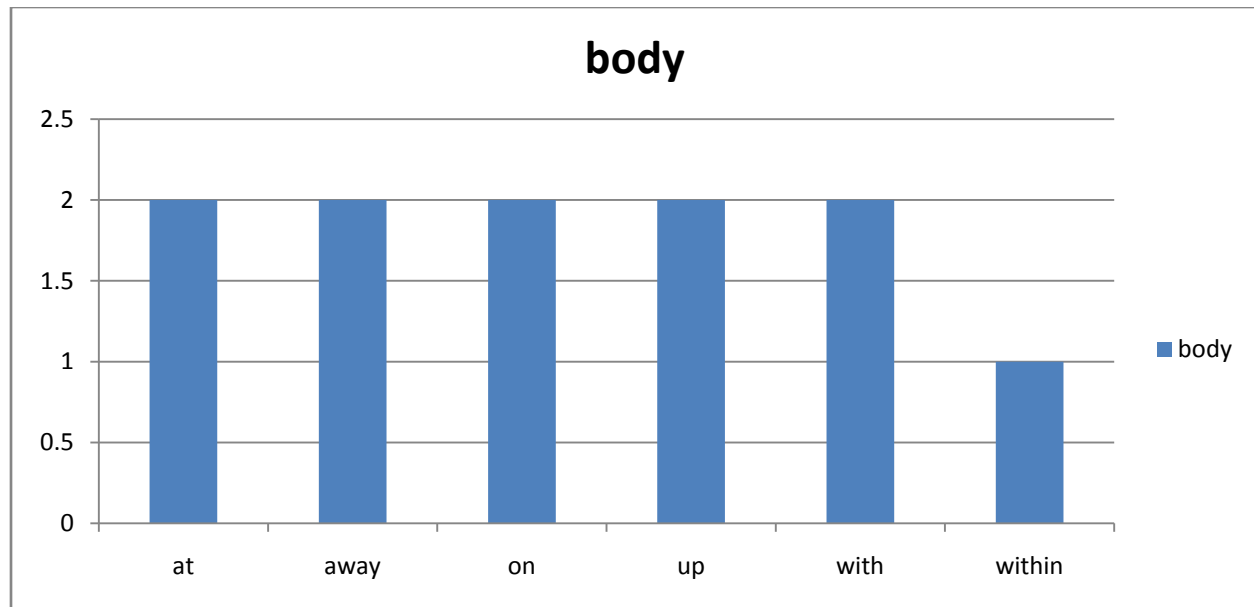


Figure 2: Tokens of prepositions in the selected five nursery rhymes under the category 'Body'.

Among the 89 words that are used in the five selected nursery rhymes, the number of prepositions is only six. They are *at*, *away*, *on*, *up*, *with*, and *within*. The total number of occurrences of these prepositions among the 243 tokens is 11. The figure 2 shows the occurrences of these prepositions i.e. *at*, *away*, *on*, *up* and *with* have occurred twice each and *within* only once.

- Nursery rhymes related to *Food*. Types : Tokens ; 107 : 280.

There are 107 types and 280 tokens in the selected nursery rhymes under the category **Food**. From these types and tokens, only the prepositions are taken into consideration. Here is a figure which shows the occurrences of prepositions in the selected nursery rhymes under this category.

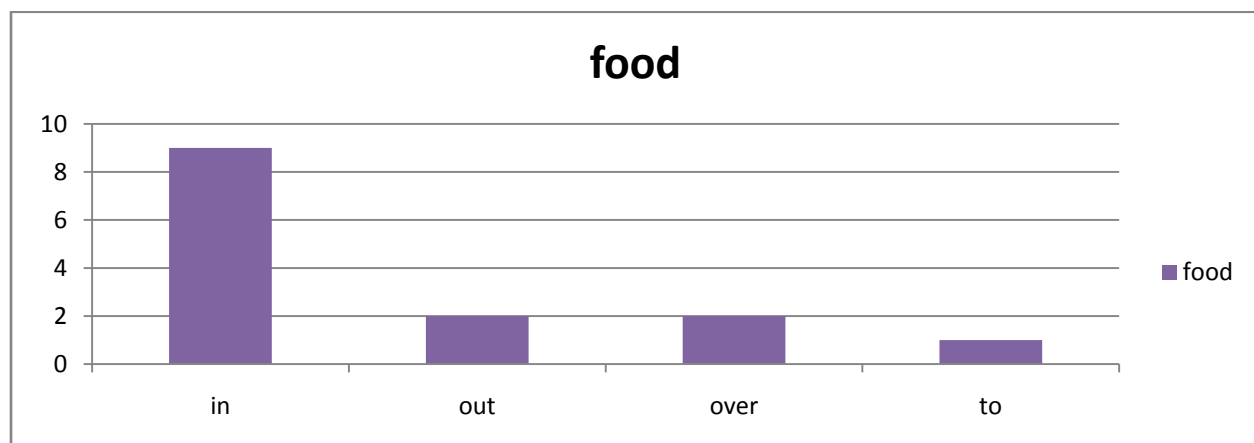


Figure 3: Tokens of prepositions in the selected five nursery rhymes under the category 'Food'.

Among the 107 words that are used in the five selected nursery rhymes, the number of prepositions is only four. They are *in*, *out*, *over* and *to*. The total number of occurrences of these prepositions among the 280 tokens is 14. The figure 3 shows the occurrences of these prepositions i.e. *in* have occurred 9 times; *out* and *over* for twice each and *to* only once.

- Nursery rhymes related to *Alphabet, Numbers and counting*. Types : Tokens ; 203 : 595.

There are 203 types and 595 tokens in the selected nursery rhymes under the category **Alphabet, Numbers and counting**. From these types and tokens, only the prepositions are taken into consideration. Here is a figure which shows the occurrences of prepositions in the selected nursery rhymes under this category.

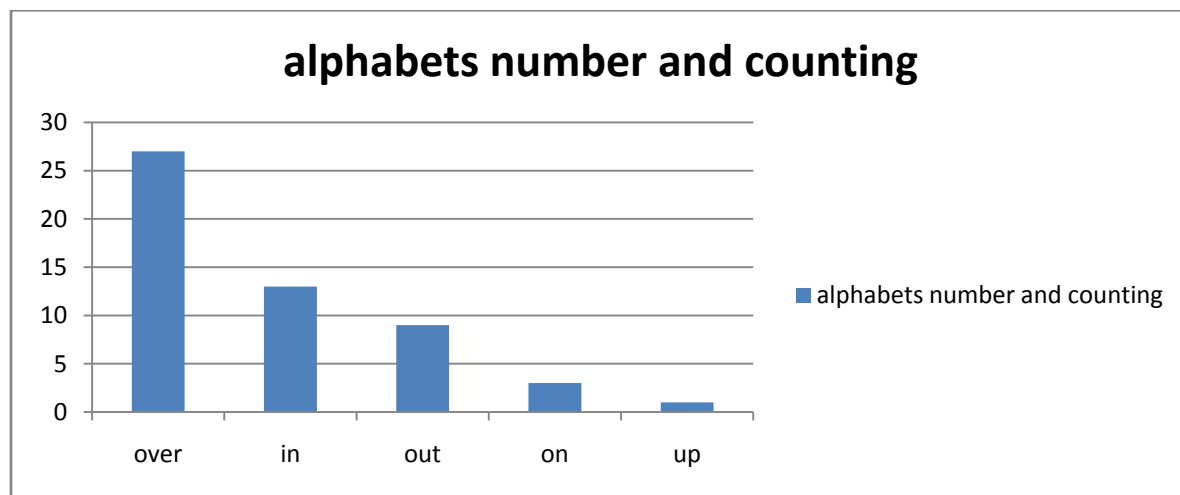


Figure 4: Tokens of prepositions in the selected five nursery rhymes under the category 'Alphabet, Numbers and counting'.

Among the 203 words that are used in the five selected nursery rhymes, the number of prepositions is only five. They are *over*, *in*, *out*, *on* and *up*. The total number of occurrences of these prepositions among the 595 tokens is 53. The figure 4 shows the occurrences of these prepositions i.e. *over* have occurred 27 times; *in* for 13 times; *out* for 9 times; *on* thrice and *up* only once.

- Nursery rhymes related to *Flowers and Nature*. Types : Tokens ; 142 : 449.

There are 142 types and 449 tokens in the selected nursery rhymes under the category **Flowers and Nature**. From these types and tokens, only the prepositions are taken into consideration. Here is a figure which shows the occurrences of prepositions in the selected nursery rhymes under this category.

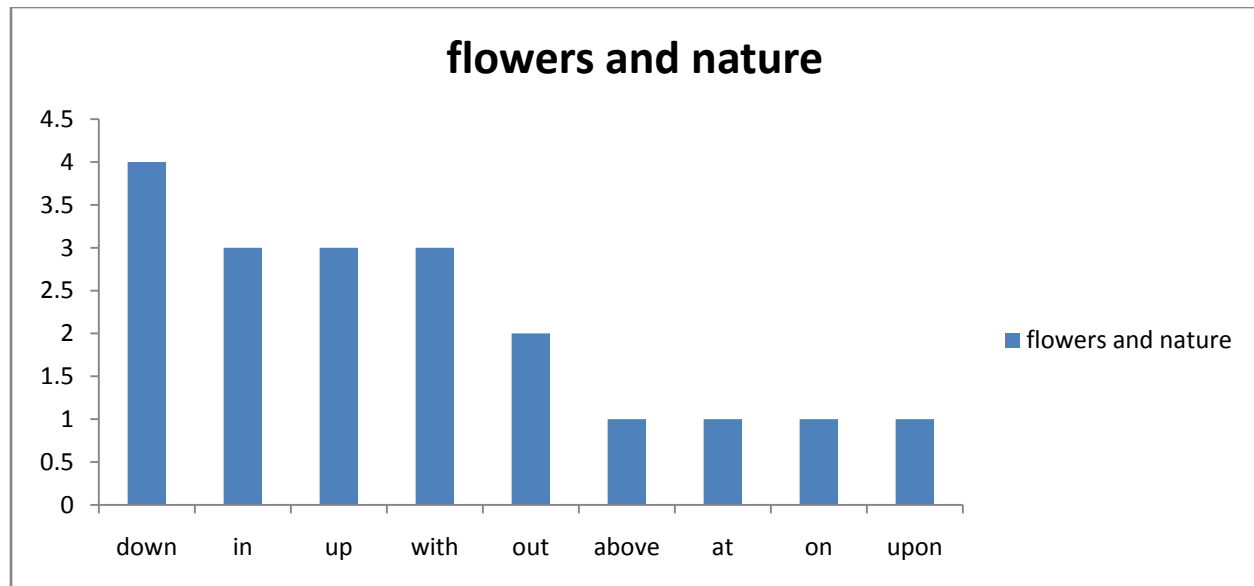


Figure 5: Tokens of prepositions in the selected five nursery rhymes under the category 'Flowers and Nature'.

Among the 142 words that are used in the five selected nursery rhymes, the number of prepositions is nine. They are *down*, *in*, *up*, *with*, *out*, *above*, *at*, *on* and *upon*. The total number of occurrences of these prepositions among the 449 tokens is 19. The figure 5 shows the occurrences of these prepositions i.e. *down* have occurred 4 times; *in*, *up* and *with* thrice each; *out* twice; *above*, *at*, *on* and *upon* only once each.

- Nursery rhymes related to *Animals*. Types : Tokens ; 102 : 229.

There are 102 types and 229 tokens in the selected nursery rhymes under the category **Animals**. From these types and tokens, only the prepositions are taken into consideration. Here is a figure which shows the occurrences of prepositions in the selected nursery rhymes under this category.

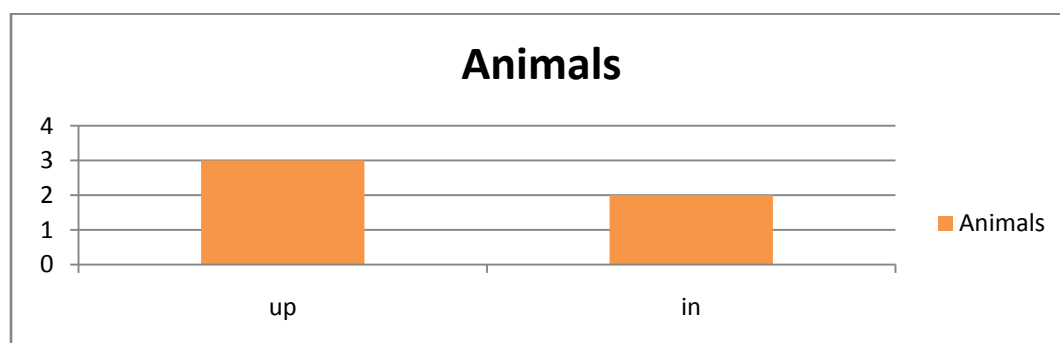


Figure 6: Tokens of prepositions in the selected five nursery rhymes under the category 'Animals'.

Among the 102 words that are used in the five selected nursery rhymes, the number of prepositions is only two. They are *up* and *in*. The total number of occurrences of these prepositions among the 229 tokens is 5. The figure 6 shows the occurrences of these prepositions i.e. *up* thrice and *in* twice.

- Nursery rhymes related to *Lullabies*. Types : Tokens ; 147 : 369.

There are 147 types and 369 tokens in the selected nursery rhymes under the category **Lullabies**. From these types and tokens, only the prepositions are taken into consideration. Here is a figure which shows the occurrences of prepositions in the selected nursery rhymes under this category.

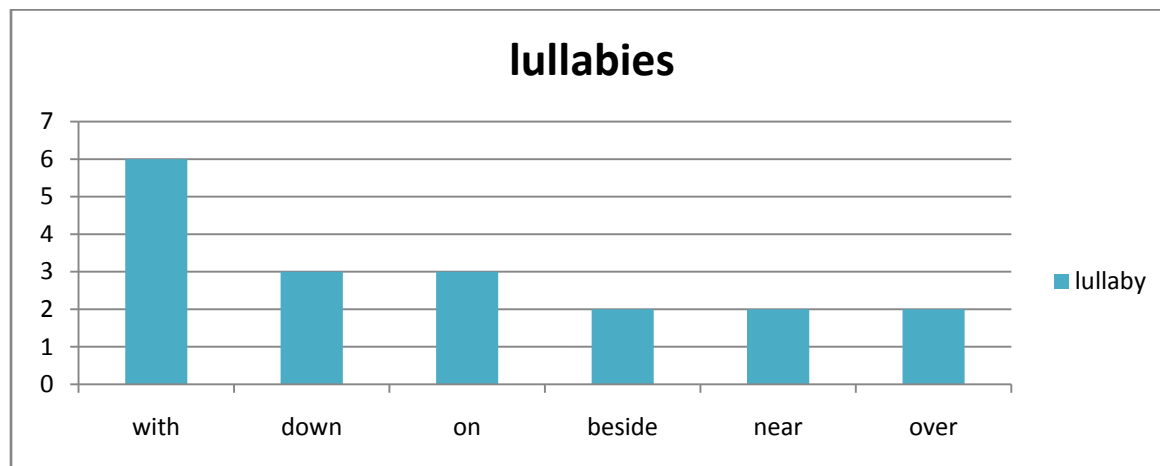


Figure 7: Tokens of prepositions in the selected five nursery rhymes under the category 'Lullabies'.

Among the 147 words that are used in the five selected nursery rhymes, the number of prepositions is only six. They are *with*, *down*, *on*, *beside*, *near* and *over*. The total number of occurrences of these prepositions among the 369 tokens is 18. The figure 7 shows the occurrences of these prepositions i.e. *with* for six times; *down* and *on* thrice each; and *beside*, *near* and *over* twice each.

These are the analysis of the selected nursery rhymes based on the frequency list of the prepositions that occur in them.

Findings, Limitations and Conclusion

After analysing the frequency list of the prepositions that occurred in the select nursery rhymes which were categorized into seven types namely transport, body, food, alphabets numbers and counting, flowers and nature, animals and lullaby, the frequency list of all the categories were compared for the purpose of the proposed study. For the convenience of the research study, the tokens of the prepositions were fed in a computer for the comparison analysis.

The graph of the comparison of occurrences of the prepositions is taken for the examining purpose of the study. The figure 8 shows the comparison of the prepositions. The prepositions that are found to occur in the selected thirty five nursery rhymes are *Above, at, away, back, beside, by, down, in, near, on, onward, out, over, to, up, upon, with* and *within*.

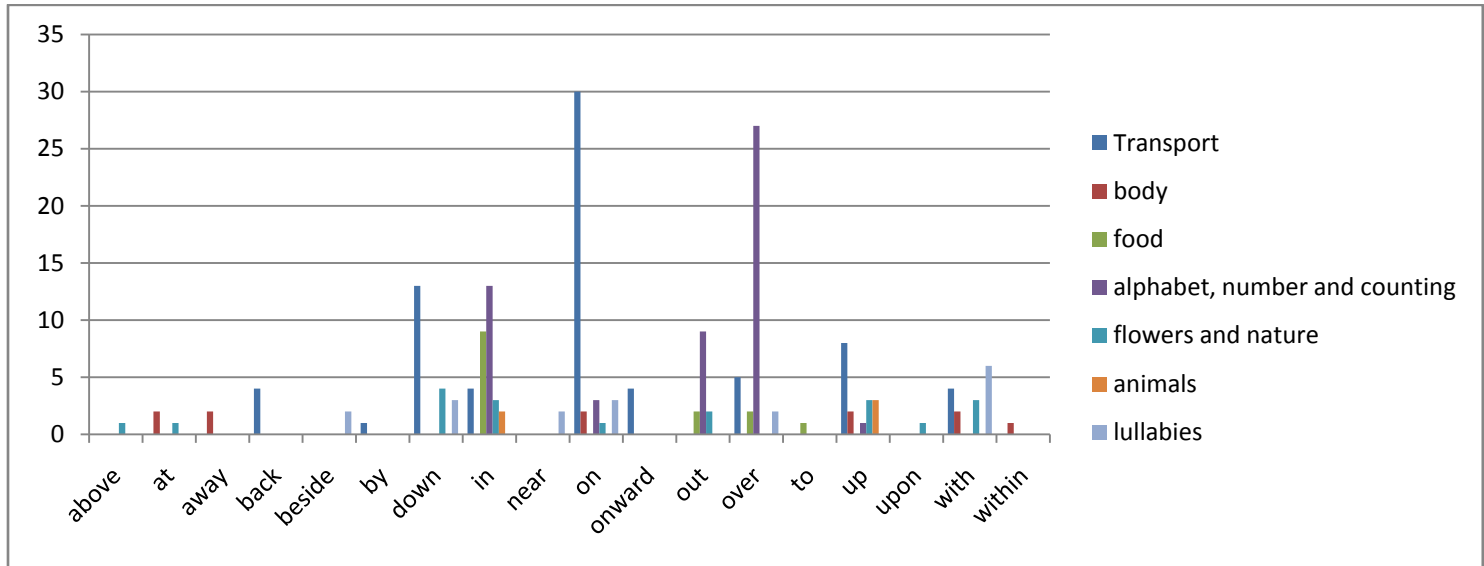


Figure 8: Comparison of tokens of prepositions in the selected nursery rhymes under the seven classified categories.

From the figure 8, it is found that there are number of prepositions occur in the select nursery rhymes. As per the assumptions made, the nursery rhymes are one of the crucial inputs of an individual's language learning. With the assumptions made as a background that the children are very interested in the nursery rhymes, the hypothesis of the study is given proof and rationale. It is found that the frequency list of the nursery rhymes is high as it was hypothesised. The figure 8 explains this in a nut shell. The frequency of prepositions in the nursery rhymes that fall under the category of transport is high with nine types and seventy three tokens.

In the same way there are numbers of frequencies occurring in the nursery rhymes. It is understood that the preposition aspect of English as second language could be internalised for the children with the teaching of the nursery rhymes.

There were some limitations that slowed the process of the study. The limitations that the researcher experienced to carry out this proposed study are the following:

- 1) There is no reliable authentic children corpus of nursery rhymes available. This hindered the selection of the nursery rhymes and to compare the frequency of prepositions in the selected nursery rhymes with the overall children corpus. So, the researcher has to carry out the study with the available sources and in mere feasibility.
- 2) The study adapted the basic and applied types of research, but the practical extension was hardly possible for the researcher to carry out this to be a better empirical study.

To arrive at a conclusion for this study, it is important to refer back to Lennenberg's critical period hypothesis (CPH) in the lights of the importance of nursery rhymes in the children's language development. The learning happens in the early ages, therefore the teaching of the lexical items using nursery rhymes, especially prepositions should be taught intensely.

There are some suggestions based on the study for future research in this area. As experienced, there is no authentic reliable corpus for children; an authentic corpus on children nursery rhymes can be compiled. The exploration in this study can further be extended for a practical research for studying the empirical implications of the applied study that the researcher worked on. The importance of internalising prepositions in children through nursery rhymes can be propagated by publishing articles and by carrying out empirical study for the research evidences.

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