

English Prepositions: New Perspectives

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Abstract

Prepositions are short words used to link certain components to indicate specific meanings. They are difficult sometimes for even the advanced learners especially when it is a matter of translation because the uses differ between the mother tongue and the learned language.

Prepositions are very important to provide adequate meaning and help in mutual understanding among speakers or people involved; therefore, the requirement for awareness of their uses is a prerequisite to any person seeks to present refined language. Consequently, the research would handle matters of great importance in relation to this area.

It is hard if it is not impossible to imagine that language users can continue communicating exposing different topics with out the use of the vivid components which are called "prepositions". And it is worth mentioning there are about 150 prepositions in English (John and Richard, 1984, p209), though it is a very small number when thinking about the thousands of other words like nouns, verbs,...etc, but they have special state in co working with other components; and this is what the research is behind.

الخلاصة:

حروف الجر هي كلمات قصيرة تستخدم لربط عناصر معينة للإشارة إلى معاني محددة. وتكون الحروف صعبة أحيانا حتى بالنسبة للمتعلمين ذوي المستويات العالية وخاصة عندما تكون مسألة ترجمة لان استخداماتها تختلف في اللغة الأم عنها في اللغة المتعلمة.

تعد حروف الجر مهمة جدا في تحقيق المعنى المناسب وتساعد في تحقيق الفهم المتبادل بين المتكلم أو الأشخاص ذوي الشأن، ولذلك فان وجوب الوعي حول استخدامها مسألة شرطية لأي شخص يبحث عن تقديم لغة سليمة. وبناءا على ذلك، فان البحث يتناول أمور في غاية الأهمية وذات علاقة بهذا الشأن.

انه من الصعب، إن لم يكن مستحيلا، إن نتخيل مستخدمي اللغة يستطيعون استمرارية التواصل ويتطرقون لمختلف المواضيع دون استخدام هذه العناصر الحيوية والتي تدعى "حروف الجر"، ومن الجدير بالذكر أن هناك أكثر من 150 حرف جر في اللغة الانكليزية (جون وريتشارد، 1984، ص 209)، بالرغم من أن هذا الرقم يعد صغيرا مقارنة بآلاف الكلمات الأخرى مثل الأسماء، الأفعال،... الخ، ولكنها تمتاز بمكانتها الخاصة في العمل مع العناصر الأخرى، وهذا ما يهدف إليه البحث.

Introduction:

It is well known that language is a means of communication that consists of many components; one of these is preposition that differentiates and shapes various extracts to send different messages and to achieve coherence among participants. Grammar is full of rules that provide 'disciplines' of how and why different elements are used. Extensive studies have dealt with prepositions from different points of views, their effects, and numerous environments prepositions are important parts of.

The problems of prepositions:

Ambiguity or confusion is sometimes a result of using certain areas when prepositions are involved, there are different issues that cause such shortcoming; like:

- Some prepositions have more than one use, and accordingly more than one meaning that lead to confusion.
- Some of them are followed by verbs and others by gerunds or other categories.
- Sometimes there is no one to one translation, for this reason the matter is complicate with regard to exactly fit the original text.
- Problem pairs: sometimes there is confusion of which preposition to be used even for the most careful writers; for instance: Off/Of:

Right: The book fell off the table.

Wrong: The book fell off of the table

And other examples: between and among, from and than. (3rd website).

Grammatical remarks:

1- *Prepositional phrase*: by which is meant a construction of a preposition that is followed by either adjective or adverb. They have common uses in English just like: along, of, through, by, under, within... and in most cases these prepositions are the anticipatory elements (followed by noun phrase) to compose the adverb in the sentence. Consequently, prepositions can

never stand alone. And it is worth mentioning that prepositions are not used with words like: home, downstairs, upstairs, uptown, inside, and outside; for example I can hear the baby crying downstairs. (Brown, 2003).

2- Common mistakes:-

Sometimes, learners express certain ideas and they put a preposition that leads to committing mistakes for certain adverbs are satisfactory and there is no need to inserting a preposition. Examples of such common mistakes are:

- I went to Malaysia last March. (Not in last March).
- She is coming back next Sunday. (Not on next Sunday).
- I go home every July. (Not at every July).
- They will call you this evening. (Not in this evening).

3- Prepositions and meanings:

There is a very strong relation between the preposition itself and the meaning highlighted, such as: He threw the book over the roof [higher than the point], and the cat hid underneath the blanket [lower than the point] and They live near the school [close to a point].

4- Prepositions with other parts of speech:

"A simple relation must exist which is a "precondition" for an expression constructed with a preposition to be acceptable" (The Slavic Resource Center, 2001, issue1). In certain cases, there is a necessity of 'building up' a combination of prepositions and words to result in having a new word. Examples like 'belief in principle' and 'understanding of justifications' could interpret what has been mentioned. Such combinations are of three kinds:

a- Nouns and prepositions

Approval of	fondness	need for
Awareness of	for	participation in
Belief in	grasp of	reason for

Confusion about	hope for	success in
Desire for	interest in	understanding of

b- Adjectives and prepositions:

Afraid of	fond of	proud of
Angry at	happy about	similar to
Capable of	interested in	sure of
Familiar with	married to	worried about

c- Verbs and prepositions:

Apologize for	give up	prepare for
Ask about	look for	study for
Belong to	forward to	talk about
Bring up	look up	think about
Care for	make up	trust in

5- Parallel form and omission:

There are certain cases which require the use of only one preposition and delete the other especially when they are parallel used in coordination; for example, She can wear that in summer and winter. since there is no need to the repetition of the same preposition which is obviously conducted, it has been omitted.

In addition, there are cases in which the existence of prepositions is obligatory when two (or more) different prepositions are part of 'environmental' meaning of the whole sentence. A sentence like: It was clear that the student could both participate in and learn from each lesson; necessity of existence comes from the meaning shaped by uses of different verbs that are followed by exact prepositions.

6- Adposition:

Many grammarians highlight this term and one of them is Quirk et al (1985,pp 210-223); simply It is a technical term used to refer to the different positions of prepositions to its complement; i.e., sometimes the preposition comes before so

it is preposition, in other cases, it comes after and it is 'postposition', and concerning 'circum position', it is the case when two parts appear on both sides of the complement; for example: Come out from under the bed.

Such cases are common because the prepositions play roles in changing and establishing the meaning of sentences as well as its grammatical structures. And its place helps in shaping the final meaning, and even in defining the modifiers, complement, verbs and other components.(The 1st website).

Adpositions are non-inflecting which means they have on paradigms not like the verbs, adjectives, nouns, etc. Generally, adpositions share certain characteristics like: they are frequently used, single (mono morphemic) words, and they form a closed class of items, and they can not be used as a possessive determiner (for example: in spite of him, not in * in his spite). Examples of adpositions are [for, it, by, from, as...].

Classifications:

a- Syntactic classification:

Although noun phrase are the most typical components, there are other combinations of syntactic categories, like: noun phrases/ It was on [the table], adjective and adjective phrases/ the climate went from awfully windy to nice, adverbs/ I helped them until recently, participial verb phrase/ Let's think about achieving the goals, interrogative clauses/ We can't agree on whether to accept or not.

b- *Semantic classification:*

A preposition can be used to express a wide range of semantic relations between their complement and the rest of the context. Regarding semantics, Kipper, Snyder, and Palmer (2004, p23) state that "there is a basic distinction between compositional (or regular) and non-compositional (or irregular/collocation) semantics; the first kind is represented by (They met on Friday), and the second is obvious in this example (They got on famously)", and there are other relations which are indicated as follows:

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- Spatial relations: location (inclusion, exclusion), direction (origin, path, endpoint)
 - Temporal relations: They met on Friday.
 - Comparison: equality, opposition: They are similar to each other.
 - Content: source, subject matter: The lecturer comments on diseases.
 - Agent: On what rule it is solved?
 - Instrument, means, and manner: They cut the tree with a big device.
 - Cause, purpose: She failed for being careless.
 - Reference: To whom I refer.
 - Functional relations

Among these kinds, there are other subdivisions; as an instance, spatial adpositions can be divided into 'directional and static' ones; The first involves motion along a path over time [like: from, towards, into...], while the second does not involve a movement [like: beside, behind, under, above...]. (Baldwin, 2009).

Controversy:

a- Specific directional and static uses:

Directional prepositions can also be divided into telic and atelic ones. Telic includes prepositions like [to, into, and across] which involve movement all the way to the endpoint denoted by their complement. When such prepositions combine with motion verbs, the result component is known as a telic verb phrase. On the other hand, 'towards and along' resemble atelic prepositions.

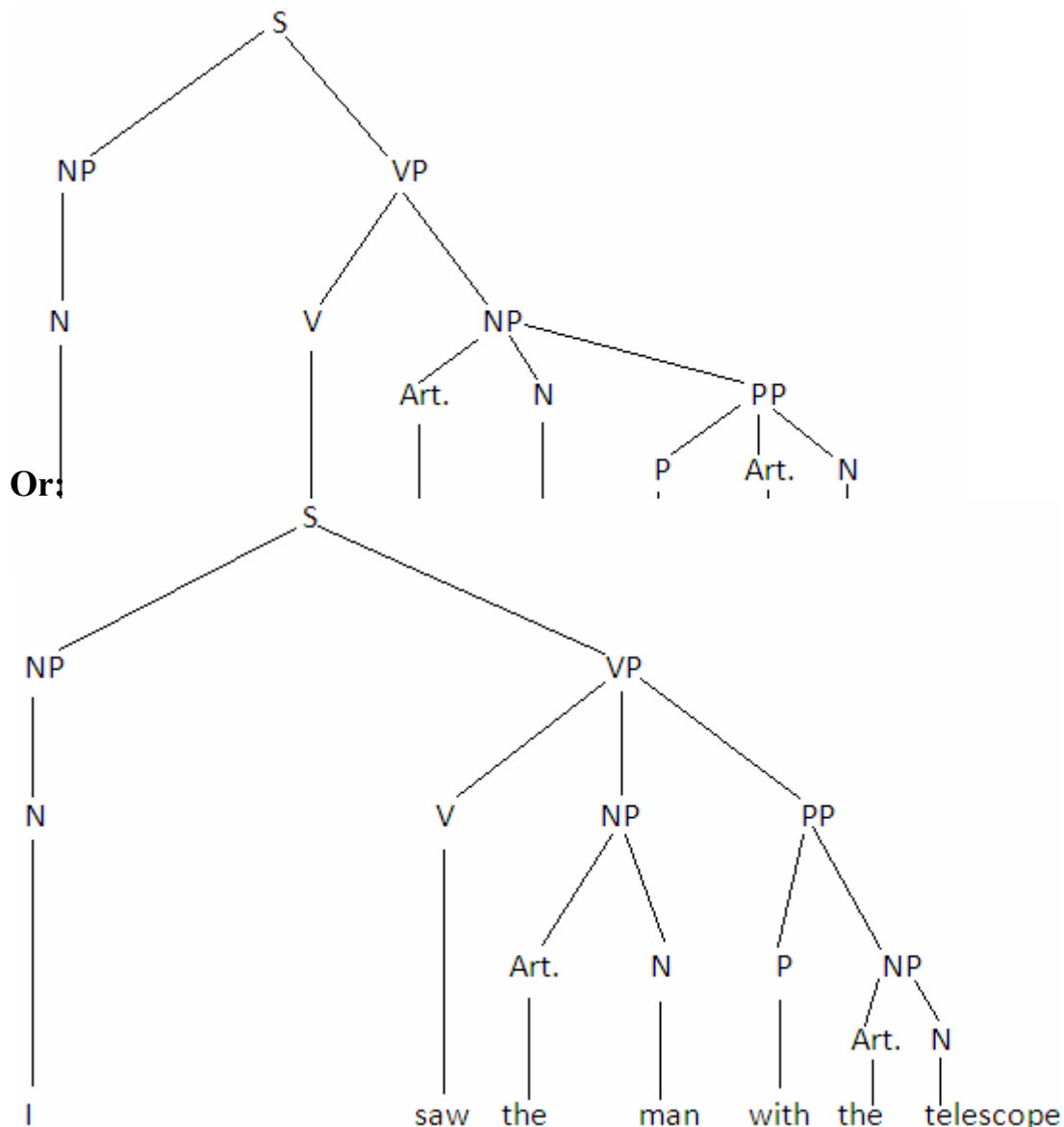
Further subdivisions can be obtained from static verbs which can be 'projective' and 'non-projective' ones. By the first is meant having a meaning determined by the complement and the preposition itself; for example, when saying Your hat is to the left of my shirt, there is a need for knowing the exact point of view, while such a thing is not required when dealing with a non-projective preposition like in the sentence the child is behind the carriage, since the back of the carriage is known to all. But sometimes prepositions like 'left of' such in My keys are to the left of the phone, can be interpreted either on the speaker's left of the phone, or on the phone's left.

b- Grammatical functions relations:

Ronald and Bresnan (1995) emphasize the idea of mechanism of structure nodes to help mapping semantic and syntactic levels of interpretation. Moreover, the mechanisms ensure the semantic compatibility which holds between preposition and surrounding components.

The adpositions generally and prepositions specifically play different functions in English grammar, like, modification (adverb-like 'across'), adjective-like 'with', predicate position, and complement. In all these cases, the prepositions share and shape the intended meaning through their combinations with the other syntactic components.

Merlo and Ferrer (2006, p1) comment on the errors occur in parsing systems because of the incorrect attachment of prepositional phrase; a sentence like: I saw the man with the telescope could be interpreted as that the pp (with the telescope) is related to the man, or to the verb, such an example and others like can be illustrated in the following two tree diagrams:



There is a high interest in pp attachment for it is a phenomenon in parsing and analyzing errors. (Lin, 2003, pp.317-330).

c- Overlaps with other categories:

Adverbs and adpositions share many functions; some adverbs are derived from the preposition and its complement, in the same way, some prepositions have adverb-like uses with no complement: down the stairs/ downstairs, underneath (the surface). In such cases they can be treated as 'intransitive' prepositions, and this analysis is applicable to other prepositions such as here, abroad, downtown,...etc.

Definitely, Particles and prepositions have the same lexical forms, but the semantic form is different. Examples of such categories are give up, carry on, come to,...conjunctions sometimes are overlapped with prepositions (before, since,...) but what affirm its identity is its position in the sentence and its relation the following or preceding elements.

Sag et al (2002, p10) refer to that there are cases in which prepositions are found as 'part of multiword expressions" such as verb-particle construction (break down), complex prepositions (by means of), and compound nominal (affairs of states).

Conclusion:

Though prepositions (or, generally, adpositions) are single and short words, but their uses demand a high awareness of what and how to choose a specific preposition in a specific context to accomplish the required and intended meaning; otherwise, misleading or incorrect output would be resulted.

Definitely, the existence of preposition provides a variety in meaning and presenting more than one idea that ensures language to be a tool of communication among human beings for achieving mutual understanding. In addition, in general cases, prepositions express relations between two entities or

items and these relations characterize the resultant component which contributes to sentences and/or clauses differently.

The following remarks can be concluded:

- Prepositions pave the way to an area that links syntactic, semantic and functional relations in having certain effects and putting focus on certain elements to share subject matters among people involved whether in spoken or written forms.
- Interpretation depends on the kinds of relations link the sentence components or it could be across the context level.
- Each change in syntactic structures can help in disambiguate or in confusion.
- Prepositions can not stand alone and their contribution comes from being part(s) of longer series.
- Prepositions' strongest relation is with the very surrounding items rather than those which are 'away' in context.
- Tree diagram is a good technique to be adopted in case having more than one interpretation; or in deciding which meaning is intended for analyzing the sentence components.

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