# ENGLISH
# PREPOSITIONS

their meanings and uses

## R. M. W. DIXON

**English Prepositions**

# English Prepositions

## Their Meanings and Uses

R. M. W. DIXON

Central Queensland University

# Contents

# Preliminaries

Prepositions include the shortest words in English, yet they play a vital role in the language. They serve to indicate how and where, when and why, purpose and association, inclusion, connection, and many other things.

Every clause must have core elements: a subject slot, filled by a noun phrase (NP)—such as *The tall woman*—and a predicate slot, filled by a verb phrase (VP)—such as *has apologised*. This suffices for an intransitive clause:

[The tall woman]$_{\text{NP:SUBJECT}}$ [has apologised]$_{\text{VP:PREDICATE}}$

A transitive clause also includes an object slot, filled by another NP; for example:

[The fat man]$_{\text{NP:SUBJECT}}$ [told]$_{\text{VP:PREDICATE}}$ [a story]$_{\text{NP:OBJECT}}$

It is convenient to have abbreviatory labels for these core functions in clause structure —'S' for intransitive subject, 'A' for transitive subject, and 'O' for transitive object. Some verbs (such as *apologise* and *arrive*) only go into an intransitive predicate slot, others (such as *tell* and *recognise*) only go into a transitive predicate slot, while some (such as *cook* and *break*) may go into either slot. (There is a third clause type, copula clauses; see sections 2.4b and 2.5.)

One could just speak using core clauses, but this would produce a rather barren discourse. We need to add trimmings, and this is achieved through peripheral constituents (PERI), each of which is an NP or a clause introduced by a preposition; for example, *inside the bedroom*, *on Tuesday*, *for the queen*, *after we have eaten*.

Do we really need prepositions? After all, one NP is recognised as being in subject function since it precedes the VP and another as being in object function since it immediately follows the VP. Why couldn't a peripheral NP just be placed after the object NP? For example:

[The tall woman]$_{\text{NP:S}}$ apologised [her husband]$_{\text{NP:PERI}}$

This is unclear. There are several ways in which the apologising could relate to the tall woman's husband. These are shown by inserting an appropriate preposition to introduce the peripheral NP:

[The tall woman]$_{\text{NP:S}}$ apologised [to her husband]$_{\text{NP:PERI}}$

(she said to her husband that she was sorry for something she had done which affected him; this is the 'beneficiary' sense of *to*; see section 7.2c)

[The tall woman]$_{\text{NP:S}}$ apologised [for her husband]$_{\text{NP:PERI}}$

(she offered an apology, on his behalf, concerning something which he had done; this is the 'benefit' sense of *for*; see section 5.3a)

[The tall woman]$_{\text{NP:S}}$ apologised [about her husband]$_{\text{NP:PERI}}$

(she expressed regret that, for instance, he was always so rude to all her relatives; see section 12.3c)

[The tall woman]$_{\text{NP:S}}$ apologised [before/after her husband]$_{\text{NP:PERI}}$

(the tall woman and her husband spoke in temporal sequence, one and then the other; these are the temporal senses of *before* and *after*; see section 14.4a)

Every core clause may take a variety of peripheral additions, each introduced by its own preposition. As another example, we can add *the bridge* as a peripheral NP after the transitive core *The fat man told a story*:

[The fat man]$_{\text{NP:A}}$ told [a story]$_{\text{NP:O}}$ [the bridge]$_{\text{NP:PERI}}$

There are again a number of ways in which the bridge may relate to the storytelling, and these are shown by the inclusion of an appropriate preposition. First, *the bridge* may be the topic of the story and then preposition *about* or *concerning* (section 12.3c) should be used:

[The fat man]$_{\text{NP:A}}$ told [a story]$_{\text{NP:O}}$ [about/concerning the bridge]$_{\text{NP:PERI}}$

Alternatively, *the bridge* could refer to the location of the storytelling. The fat man could place himself above or below or adjacent to the bridge:

[The fat man]$_{\text{NP:A}}$ told [a story]$_{\text{NP:O}}$ [on the bridge]$_{\text{NP:PERI}}$

[The fat man]$_{\text{NP:A}}$ told [a story]$_{\text{NP:O}}$ [under/underneath/beneath the bridge]$_{\text{NP:PERI}}$

[The fat man]$_{\text{NP:A}}$ told [a story]$_{\text{NP:O}}$ [by/beside the bridge]$_{\text{NP:PERI}}$

Prepositions *under*, *beneath*, and *underneath* have slightly different senses and possibilities for usage; these are explained in section 11.1. *By* is a very common preposition with one of its senses 'near to, not quite reaching' (section 6.1a), having similar meaning to *beside* (section 9.4c).

There are a handful of verbs which have three semantic roles. For instance, *give* requires Donor, Gift, and Recipient. Two of these can relate to subject and object functions, but for the third a peripheral NP, marked by preposition *to* is generally needed:

[The student]$_{\text{DONOR:A}}$ gave [an apple]$_{\text{GIFT:O}}$ to the teacher]$_{\text{RECIPIENT:PERI}}$

There is an alternative construction:

[The student]$_{\text{DONOR:A}}$ gave [the teacher]$_{\text{RECIPIENT:O}}$ [an apple]$_{\text{GIFT}}$

Here the Recipient NP, *the teacher*, moves next to the verb, taking on O function. The Gift NP, *an apple*, follows it without a preposition. Grammarians differ as to what the function of *an apple* is in this sentence. Is it a 'second object', or a peripheral NP with zero marking?

\* \* \*

This book aims to provide an integrated account of the main prepositions of English, together with associated adverbs. The prepositions are grouped together in terms of similar meanings and functions. For instance, *beneath* and *underneath* are linked to *over* and *under*, and *above* and *below*, as varying expressions of 'vertical position'; *among(st)*, *amid(st)*, *between*, and *in-between* are exemplars of 'distribution', while *along*, *alongside*, *across*, and *through* describe kinds of 'passage'.

For each preposition there is an account of its genetic origin and shifts of form and meaning over the centuries. An instructive way to appreciate the meanings of prepositions is by studying instances where two prepositions may be used in the same frame with meanings which show some similarity but also a significant difference. For instance, what is the difference between *These elm trees have died out* and *These elm trees have died off* (see section 9.2d-2), and between *Shut the door behind you!* and *Shut the door after you!* (section 14.4e-3)? This technique of comparison is employed throughout the book.

## Nomenclature

There are a number of varieties of prepositions and it is useful to employ the following labels:

- **Simple prepositions**, such as *in*, *of*, *since*, *under*, and *through*. Note that some derive from two elements historically but function as a single unit in the present-day language; for example, *across*, *behind*, and *within*.
- **Complex prepositions**, each being composed of two simple prepositions. These include *into*, *out-of*, *upon*, and *in-between*. Note that some of them are conventionally written as one word, others as two; the latter are here provided with a hyphen, to show that they do each constitute a single preposition.
- **Phrasal prepositions,** each made up of adverb, noun, adjective, or conjunction, sometimes preceded by a simple preposition and always followed by one. By far the most common final element is *of*; others are *for*, *to*, *from*, and *with*. Phrasal prepositions include, among many others (hyphens are again inserted to show that each functions as single unit): *ahead-of*, *in-spite-of*, *by-means-of*, *but-for*, *close-to*, *far-from*, and *together-with*.

## The organisation of this book

Language can be likened to a theatre (the theatre of life) and explaining how it works is like recounting a tale. Indeed, the introductory chapter is entitled 'A story to tell'. It introduces the reader to the roles of prepositions in English, outlining their various forms and illustrating contrastive senses.

Three chapters make up Part I 'The Stage is Set'. These delineate grammatical contexts of occurrence, and special uses. Chapter 2, 'Grammatical roles', distinguishes between 'inner' and 'outer' prepositional phrases, examines syntactic functions, and investigates the effects of inserting or omitting a preposition. Chapter 3 provides a detailed account of 'phrasal verbs'; these are complex verbs each consisting of a simple verb (which can occur alone) plus one or two prepositions or adverbs. The meaning of a phrasal verb cannot be obviously inferred from the basic meanings of its components. Thus, it must be accorded an entry all of its own in

the dictionary; for example, *The rain has* <u>set in</u>, *He is going to* <u>lay off</u> *booze*, *She* <u>made</u> *a story* <u>up</u>. Chapter 4 is concerned with 'prepositional verbs'; these are verbs which cannot be used on their own but must be accompanied by a preposition. For example, *dispose of, long for, deal with*. The noun phrase following the preposition functions in many ways like the object of a transitive verb.

The stage having been set in Part I, the chapters of Part II describe the prepositions which strut upon the stage. Each chapter deals with a set of related prepositions, providing an integrated account of the meanings for each, and how these are linked to their grammatical properties. There are two chapters on relational prepositions—principally *of, for, by,* and *with*—which have only minor reference to space or time. These are followed by seven chapters on prepositions whose basic meaning is spatial, with many extensions to abstract senses. Chapter 14 ties together the varied ways through which prepositions deal with time.

Each chapter unites a group of prepositions which have similar meanings. They are often a mixture with respect to their status—simple prepositions, complex prepositions, and phrasal prepositions. Some adverbs are also included in the discussion when they are part of the pattern; for example, *forth* and *back* (section 11.2). Every simple preposition and complex preposition is dealt with quite thoroughly, but only those phrasal prepositions which feature as members of the various semantic sets are included in the analysis.

The final chapter tells how some people have attempted to prescribe how language should be used; it also mentions dialect variation, foreign learners' errors, and prospects for the future.

Care has been taken to make the book accessible to a broad spectrum of readers by avoiding esoteric technical terms. Although a wide range of data sources has been used, the judgements are basically mine, on the basis of my native speaker competence in Standard British English. There are a number of references throughout to differences in Standard American English, and a summary of some of these in section 15.3a.

For each preposition, a set of basic senses and uses have been outlined. These summarise what my researches have shown to be its canonical character. Around this there will be variation of many kinds—social, regional, individual. The way in which each person uses language always bears a measure of creativity. But variation is always with respect to a norm, and this is what I have tried to delineate.

## Check list of prepositions discussed

**Note:** * indicates that this form also functions as an adverb; ** indicates that *up* and *down* are primarily adverbs, secondarily prepositions.

**(1)** **Simple prepositions**

    **(a)** Realised as clitics unless stressed (see section 1.6):

        *at*, *for*, *from*, *of*, *to*; plus *by*, *with* which are sometimes realised as clitics

    **(b)** Other monosyllabics:

        *down\*\**, *in\**, *off\**, *on\**, *out\**, *past*, *since*, *till*, *up\*\**

    **(c)** Polysyllabics:

        *about\**, *above*, *across\**, *after*, *against*, *along\**, *amid(st)*, *among(st)*, *(a)round\**, *before*, *behind*, *below*, *beneath*, *beside(s)\**, *between*, *beyond*, *concerning*, *despite*, *during*, *over\**, *through\**, *toward(s)*, *under*, *underneath*, *until*, *within\**, *without\**

**(2)** **Complex prepositions**, each being a combination of two simple prepositions

    **(a)** Realised as a clitic unless stressed:

        *into*, *off-of*, *onto*, *out-of*, *upon*, *up-to*

    **(b)** Others:

        *in-between*, *throughout\**, *up-until*, *alongside* (treated as basically *along* plus *besides*; see section 11.4a-1)

**(3)** **Having two forms**:

    **(a)** As **simple preposition**, and **(b)** Adding one *of* or *for* or *to*, creating a **complex preposition**—realised as a clitic (by virtue of their final component) unless stressed:

        *except(-for)*, *inside(-of)\**, *near(-to)*, *outside(-of)\**

**(4)** **Phrasal preposition**. Adverb, noun, adjective, or conjunction plus one or more simple prepositions—realised as a clitic (by virtue of their final component) unless stressed. Note that only some of the several dozen phrasal prepositions are dealt with in this book; basically, those which fit into the semantic sets featuring simple and complex prepositions.

    **(a)** Based on an adverb:

        *ahead-of*, *apart-from*, *aside-from*, *away-from*, *instead-of*, *together-with*

**(b)** Based on a noun or adjective:
*close-to*, *far-from*, *in-exchange-for*, *in-front-of*, *in-return-for*, *in-spite-of*

**(c)** Based on a conjunction:
*because-of*, *but-for*

A number of adverbs are mentioned in connection with the discussion of prepositions: *afterwards*, *back*, *beforehand*, *forth*, *forward(s)*, *backward(s)*, *upward(s)*, *downward(s)*, *inward(s)*, *outward(s)*, and *onward(s)*.

There are a number of other items which have marginal status as prepositions and/or have been listed as prepositions by some grammarians. They are not included here since there had to be a limit, or else the book would have expanded on and on. They include: *as* (which has very minor use as a preposition), *abroad*, *astride*, *following*, *including*, *like*, *notwithstanding*, *plus*, *opposite*, *qua*, *re*, *regarding*, *sans*, *than*, and *via*.

# Abbreviations and conventions

*Abbreviations*

Syntactic functions

| | |
|---|---|
| A | transitive subject core function |
| S | intransitive subject core function |
| O | transitive object core function |
| CS | copula subject core function |
| CC | copula complement core function |
| PERI | peripheral function |

Constituents

| | |
|---|---|
| NP | noun phase |
| VP | verb phrase |
| pNP | peripheral noun phrase (noun phrase introduced by preposition, showing its meaning and function) |
| CoCl | complement clause (clause filling a core argument slot in a main clause, as an alternative to an NP in that slot; see section 2.5c) |

Languages

| | |
|---|---|
| OE | Old English (also known as Anglo-Saxon), spoken from the fifth to the twelfth century |
| ME | Middle English, spoken from the twelfth to the end of the fifteenth century |

In chapter 15

| | |
|---|---|
| BrE | standard British English |
| AmE | standard American English |
| L1 | person who learns a language as their first language; native speaker |
| L2 | person who learns a language as their second language; foreign learner |

*Conventions*

| | |
|---|---|
| = | clitic boundary; see section 1.6 |
| /…/ | encloses phonological representation |
| […] | encloses constituent |
| | typically used with a subscript indicating syntactic function; for example: [the truth]$_O$, or constituent type; for example: [that he is fat]$_{CoCl}$; or both: [the truth]$_{NP:O}$, [that he is fat]$_{CoCl:CS}$ |
| (…) | adds an additional, explanatory portion to the sentence |
| | for example: John was jealous of Jill (since she had got the job he wanted) |
| * | unacceptable sentence |

If a complex preposition or a phrasal preposition is conventionally written as a sequence of separate words, they are here joined by hyphens to show that they constitute one prepositional unit; for example: *out-of*, *near-to*, *in-spite-of*.

When a phrasal verb is quoted within a sentence, it is underlined; for example: *The manager put down Tom's loss to inexperience*.

Slots in phrasal verb structures are in bold type: **a**, **p**; see section 3.2.

# 1

# A story to tell

The function of a preposition in English is to mark a noun phrase (NP) which is neither subject nor object, but ancillary to the core elements of a clause.

The role of language is to express meanings, and typically for a meaning to be communicated from speaker (or writer) to addressee(s). Each preposition carries a meaning, as does each verb, noun, and adjective. Which preposition is used in a particular circumstance, and which sense of it is appropriate, is determined by the meanings of the words it is combined with. This can be shown by examples.

Every preposition has a range of senses, and the most common prepositions have the widest ranges. Which sense is appropriate in a given instance of use may depend on the verb it follows. Consider:

(1)    Sam baked a cake for Christmas          <reason for the activity>
(2)    Sam visited her parents for Christmas    <duration of the activity>

The 'reason' sense in (1) is also shown in *Sheila is saving for a rainy day* and *Frederick thanked Matilda for the flowers* (see section 5.3b), while the 'duration' sense in (2) is further illustrated by *Jason slept for an hour* and *Robin has been angry for quite a while* (see section 5.3f). Which sense is appropriate is determined by the meaning of verb-plus-object— *baked a cake* or *visited her parents*.

In both (1) and (2), *for* is followed by *Christmas*. An alternative is for the core of the clause to be the same, but for the NP following *for* to differ, with this entailing different senses of the preposition, as in:

(3)    Mary bought the book for Tom                     <benefit>
(4)    Mary bought the book for ten dollars             <exchange>

Other examples of the 'benefit' sense in (3) include *Uncle Fred coached me for the exam* and *Maria was a witness for the defence* (see section 5.3a). The 'exchange' sense, of (4), also occurs in: *Chris exchanged his gun for a bicycle*, and *Simon has to pay compensation for the damage caused* (see section 5.3e).

The nature of the NP following *for* determines which sense of the preposition is appropriate—'benefit' when the NP refers to a person, and 'exchange' when it indicates a sum of money. In this instance, both *for* phrases can be included:

(5)    Mary bought the book for Tom for ten dollars

This is the most felicitous ordering of the *for phrase*s, with 'benefit' before 'exchange' (see section 5.3i). If the reverse order were employed we would expect juxtapositonal intonation (shown in writing by a comma) before *for Tom*, indicating that this is something of an afterthought: *Mary bought the book for ten dollars, for Tom*.

There are occasions when a preposition may be used with two different senses in the same sentence. For instance:

(6)    The lowlanders fought with the highlanders

This sentence is ambiguous. It can carry the meaning of 'association' (see section 6.2b-4)—the lowlands were allied with the highlanders in fighting the invaders. Further examples of this sense are *Stella talked with Cressida* and *Maisie played with the dog*. *With* in (6) can be extended to *together-with*, making the sentence unambiguous:

(7)   The lowlanders fought together-with the
       highlanders                                        <association>

The other meaning of (6) is 'directed activity' (see section 6.2e). Under this interpretation, the lowlanders were opposed to the highlanders. A further example of the confrontation sense is: *James struggled with incipient dementia* and *She is quite up to competing with the best in the world*. In this sense, *with* can be replaced by *against*, and the sentence is unambiguous:

(8)   The lowlanders fought against the
       highlanders                                        <directed activity>

We saw in (5) that a sentence may include two *for* phrases, one in the 'benefit' and one in the 'exchange' sense. This is not possible for *with*. One can say:

(9)    The lowlanders fought (together-) with the
        highlanders                                       <association>
(10)   The lowlanders fought with/against the
        invaders                                          <directed activity>

But not

(11)   *The lowlanders fought (together-) with the highlanders with
        the invaders

This has to be stated as:

(12)   The lowlanders fought (together-) with the highlanders against
        the invaders

What is fascinating is instances where two prepositions may be used in the same frame, with meanings which show some similarity but also a significant difference. This is an instructive way to appreciate the meanings of prepositions—by well-chosen comparisons—and will be employed throughout the book. Here are three preliminary examples.

## 1.1 Selected contrasts

### 1.1a To *and* at

One can say either of:

(13)    Mike threw the ball to Ian (implied: for Ian
            to catch it)                                          <beneficiary>
(14)    Mike threw the ball at Ian (implied: for it to
            hit Ian)                                              <target>

The use of *to* in (13) indicates a link of 'receiving' between the partici-
pants in the activity; Ian is the 'destination' of the throw, and he now has
the benefit of holding the ball. Other instances of this sense of the prep-
osition include *Susan gave the ball to Tom* and *Robin explained the
nature of the problem to Martin* (see section 7.2c). When *to* is replaced
by *at*, as in (14), the NP following the preposition becomes the target of
the activity. This sense of *at* is also shown in *The actress smiled at me* and
*The judge wanted to get at the truth* (see section 7.1c).

  *Throw* has a wide range of meaning, enabling it to be used in both a
'beneficiary' and a 'target' context. Specialised verbs of throwing are
more restricted. *Hurl* refers to throwing with force and is likely only to
be used in a 'target' construction, *Mike hurled the ball at Ian*. In contrast,
the verb *toss* is used for gentle throwing and is most at home in a 'ben-
eficiary' sentence such as *Mike tossed the ball to Ian*.

  There are other contexts within which *to* and *at* contrast in similar
fashion. For instance, *talk* generally implies a joint activity. On hearing:

(15)    Peter talked to Jean                          <beneficiary>

one infers that this was a conversation, with Jean responding. However,
suppose that Peter just bombarded Jean with his opinions, not inviting
her to respond. *At* could then be used to indicate a 'target' meaning:

(16)    Peter talked at Jean                          <target>

Other verbs of communication have more limited meaning and, conse-
quently, restricted grammatical possibilities. *Bawl* indicates aggressive
vocal activity; one hears *Peter bawled at Jean* but never *\*Peter bawled to
Jean*. And with the verb *pray*, one could say *The proselyte prayed to his
god* (as a way of engaging with the deity) but not *\*The proselyte prayed
at his god*.

## 1.1b  Of *and* about

There are many contexts in which either *of* or *about* may be used. There is always a contrast between them—sometimes obvious, other times more subtle. We can commence with a clear example:

(17)   A book of poetry                                  <expansion>
(18)   A book about poetry                            <general topic>

Noun phrase (17), with *of*, refers to a book including a number of poems. The *of poetry* expands on the referent of *book*, indicating what sort of book it is. This construction, *X of Y*, states that X consists of Y. Similar examples of this sense of preposition *of* include *a bottle of wine*, *a tour of the factory*, and *the theory of relativity* (see section 5.2b).

In contrast, in (18) the book just concerns poetry, perhaps a critical discussion of the genre. The NP following *about* refers to some general topic. Other examples are: *a dispute about property rights* and *He's glad about the good results* (see section 12.3c). Another contrast is:

(19)   Kate thought of a solution to the problem         <knowledge>
(20)   Mark thought about a solution to the
       problem                                       <general topic>

Kate had been searching her brain to come up with a solution (see section 5.2g) but Mark was doing something quite different. He was ruminating over a possible solution—its difficulty, its ramifications, how nice it would be to receive the prize offered for the correct solution.

Granpa has for some time been *complaining about his poor health* (a general topic). But today he *complained of a new pain in his back* (something specific). Ted is *hopeful of a good result* (a specific outcome) whereas Fred is simply *hopeful about the outcome* (something more general).

Language is not a cut-and-dried matter, like the properties of rocks or neutrons. The use of language is fuzzy so that it is often not possible to come to yes-or-no conclusions (or not sensible to try to do so). We deal instead with tendencies and proclivities. In (17) and (18) the contrastive use of *about* and *of* is quite definite. For other examples, the interpretations given are the predominant ones. However there are some instances of people employing *of* where I have preferred *about*, and vice versa. Some would criticise such deviations as sloppy usage; others would hail them as tokens of the elasticity of present-day English.

*1.1c* In *and* out-of

Quite a few prepositions group into pairs of 'opposites'; for example: *to* and *from*, *on* and *off*, *up* and *down*, *over* and *under* (see section 1.5). Also *in* and *out-of*, as in:

(21)    Jane is standing in the sun
(22)    Kate is standing out-of the sun
(23)    Joseph is still in hiding
(24)    Matthew is now out-of hiding

*In* and *out-of* plainly have opposite meanings here.

How then do we explain the fact that the following two sentences have the same pragmatic effect:

(25)    Bill hit Fred in anger                         &lt;in a state of&gt;
(26)    Bill hit Fred out-of anger                     &lt;arising from&gt;

Both sentences describe Bill hitting Fred, with the reason being anger. But the circumstances differ. For (25), Bill experienced a flair-up of anger (a fit of anger) in the course of an encounter with Fred and hit him impetuously, without having planned to do so (he may regret it later and perhaps apologise). Further examples of this 'in a state of' sense of preposition *in* include: *The victim cried out in pain*, and *Mavis sat in silence* (section 8.1c).

In contrast, (26) is likely to refer to a premeditated act of hitting, which Bill had planned because he had been angered by something Fred had done earlier on (in this instance, he is unlikely to feel any need to apologise later). Other examples of the 'arising from' sense of *out-of* include: *Jane voted for Hannah out-of loyalty*, and *Charlie forgave Sam out-of love* (section 8.2b).

## 1.2  Meanings

Each preposition has a basic meaning and a number of extensions from this, mostly of a more abstract nature. Language is founded on the concrete world; as a consequence most prepositions have a basic meaning relating to space or to time.

I. **Basic meanings spatial.** There are here two subtypes.
   Ia. **With a secondary sense relating to time**. These include: *at*, *to*, *from*, *in*, *on*, *behind*, *between*, and about twenty more.
   Ib. **With no temporal sense**. These include: *upon*, *onto*, *beside(s)*, *among*, *beneath*, *despite*, *above*, and just a few more.
II. **Basic meaning temporal.** We again find two subtypes:
   IIa. **With a secondary sense relating to space:** *before*, *after*, *past*.
   IIb. **With no spatial sense:** *since*, *until/till*, *during*.
III. **Basic meaning purely relational**. These are frequent and wide-ranging prepositions—*of*, *for*, *by*, and *with*. Both *for* and *by* also show secondary temporal senses (for example, *The meeting is planned for late June* and *Be home by five o'clock!*) and *by* can refer to space (as in *Sally stood by the tree*).

The sense which a preposition assumes in each instance of use is determined in large part by the verb (and other words and grammatical elements) it is used with. This can be briefly illustrated with *against*.

The meaning of **against** is 'opposed to'. Basic spatial uses are: *Tony swam against the tide* and *Martha pushed against the door*. The latter sentence implies that the door was not easy to open, being perhaps stiff or stuck. Note the comparison with *Martha pushed on the door* which just implies making contact with the door to open it easily, with no impedance involved. Extensions of meaning for *against* include reference to mental attitude (for example, *have a prejudice against*) and contrast (*The red roof stood out against the blue sky*). A full account is in section 9.3.

We saw that in the context *push — the door*, *on* and *against* imply different degrees of force. However, in some frames the two prepositions appear synonymous; for example, *wage war on the invaders* and *wage war against the invaders*.

Now consider use of the two prepositions for the placement of a picture with respect to a wall:

(27)  Igor hung the picture on the wall
(28)  Elena turned the picture against the wall

Sentence (27) describes a normal activity—the picture is placed on the wall (so that it does not fall down). It will be put front-out since being able to see the front is the whole point of the exercise. Then (28)

describes something entirely different. Elena takes a dislike to what is portrayed on the picture and reverses it. The front of the picture is now towards the wall; the use of *against* indicates that it is opposite to the way it should be.

*On* (and *onto*) are common prepositions with a wide range of uses and meanings. We can here just provide a sample, which is a smallish fraction of the whole. Note that *on* and *onto* are sometimes interchangeable, other times not. There is a full account in section 9.1.

**On(to)** indicates 'connection', and generally carries positive overtones. Its pairing, *off*, shows 'disconnection' which is typically (but by no means always) negative.

(i)   The basic sense is 'connection'. This can be supported by gravity, as in: *Put the cup on the table!* or by some physical means, as in *Sew the button on the shirt!* or *They fixed the undercarriage on the plane.*

(ii)   *On(to)* is used for the prolongation of connection, as in *Hang onto the other end of the rope, so that we don't get separated in the dark!*

(iii)   This basic sense can be extended to where there is just oversight. For example: *Hang onto your late father's desk*! is an injunction not to let anyone take it away. This does not necessarily imply holding on to it physically (although this may well be appropriate if someone attempts to remove it).

(iv)   The verb *live* has a range of meanings—just for existence (*Is he still living?*) or for where the existence takes place, or the dependency by which it is maintained. *On* can be used, in rather different senses, for these two kinds of statement—*He lives on the coast*, and *He lives on beans and rice.*

(v)   The focus of an activity may be marked by *on*, as in *The detective tapped on the wall with his mallet until he heard a hollow sound, indicating the secret hiding place.* Then he knew: *He had hit on the hollow.*

(vi)   One can say: *Our new house is built on the existing foundations.* An abstract extension of this is: *Our new project is built on Aaron's insight.*

## 1.3 Phrasal verbs

Present-day English has hundreds of what are called 'phrasal verbs'. These are complex verbs each consisting of a simple verb (which can occur alone) plus one or two prepositions or adverbs. The meaning of a phrasal verb cannot be obviously inferred from the basic meanings of its components—verb, preposition, adverb. Thus, it must be accorded an entry all of its own in the dictionary. Sentential examples (with the phrasal verbs <u>underlined</u>) are: *The rain <u>set in</u>*, *The boy <u>turned against</u> his father*, and *Derek <u>made</u> the company <u>over to</u> his brother*.

It is true that the meaning of a phrasal verb cannot be easily inferred from the basic meanings of its components. However, its meaning is not simply idiosyncratic. In very many instances it relates not to basic meanings but to extended meanings of the words making it up.

A preliminary illustration can be provided for three phrasal verbs which each involve *on(to)* and one with *against*. (Many further analyses are provided in chapter 3 and throughout the chapters of part II).

**(a)** *Hang onto*, as in:

(29)    Make sure you <u>hang onto</u> this job Uncle Peter has organised for you; if you misbehave and get fired, you'll find it difficult to get another job

Senses (ii) and (iii) just given for *on(to)* relate to concrete objects: *Hang onto the end of the rope!* and *Hang onto your father's desk!*, the latter indicating oversight rather than necessary physical contact. These naturally extend to <u>*hang onto*</u> *this job*, describing something that is more abstract. The message is, once again, 'prolong it, don't let it get away!'.

**(b)** *Live on*, as in

(30)    He can barely <u>live on</u> the small monthly allowance from his mother

This is an extension from the dependency of *on*—given under (iv)—as in *He lives on beans and rice*. A monthly allowance has a more general reference; it is not something that can be directly eaten, like beans and rice, but it provides the wherewithal for purchasing food which will assist in maintaining life.

**(c)** *Hit on,* as in

(31)    Aaron thought about it a lot and has just <u>hit on</u> an interesting
        idea

Under sense (v) for *on* we had *The detective had hit on the hollow.* Substituting 'brain' for 'mallet', and 'an interesting idea' for 'the hollow', the sense of discovery conveyed by the phrasal verb of (31) is seen to be an extension from the basic sense of *on*.

**(d)** *Turn against*, as in:

(32)    The wicked stepmother <u>turned</u> the boy <u>against</u> his father

This is plainly an extension from the basic sense of against, as illustrated in (28), *Elena turned the picture against the wall*, meaning that it was opposite to the way it should be. The normal situation is for a picture to be face-out and for a boy to have positive feelings towards his father. The replacement of these by hostility is shown by using *against* (this is similar to the hostility of *have a prejudice against*).

There need not be any causer involved. One may hear, simply, *The boy turned against his father*. (There is no similar intransitive sentence with 'picture', since pictures do not turn all by themselves.)

There is a syntactic criterion which helps to recognise what is a phrasal verb. When a question involves a regular peripheral NP, the preposition may either be fronted with the question word or else left behind. For example, a question based on *The cat sat on the mat* could be either *On what did the cat sit?* or *What did the cat sit on?* In contrast, with a phrasal verb, it is often the case that the preposition may not be fronted. Based on *The boss <u>laid off</u> the workers* we can have *Who did the boss <u>lay off</u>?*, but not *\*<u>Off</u> who did the boss <u>lay</u>?* That is, in a phrasal verb, simple verb and preposition should remain together.

Chapter 3 has a full discussion of the semantics and syntax of phrasal verbs.

## 1.4 Prepositional verbs

There are a number of verbs which cannot be used on their own but must be accompanied by a preposition. For example *dispose of*, *long*

*for*, *deal with*, *refer to*, *depend on*. The NP following the preposition functions in many ways like a transitive object; for example, from *They disposed of the body* is derived the passive sentence *The body was disposed of*. The verb plus preposition makes up a complex lexical unit, the whole functioning like a transitive verb. (During the detailed discussion of prepositional verbs, in chapter 4, it will be seen that the NP following the preposition differs in minor respects from a straightforward transitive object; the reason for this is explained in section 4.3.)

Note that these 'prepositional verbs' are quite different from phrasal verbs, where the verbal component may occur on its own. *Turn* can be used outside phrasal verbs such as *turn against*, *turn down (the offer)*, and *turn to (the vicar for help)*, whereas *dispose* requires its 'inherent preposition' *of*.

The meaning of a prepositional verb can be related to extended senses of its components, in a similar way to that just exemplified for phrasal verbs. Consider, for instance, prepositional verb *depend on*, exemplified in:

(33)    The success of our new project depends on Aaron's insight

This plainly relates to sense (vi) of *on*, with *Our new project is built on Aaron's insight*.

Similarly to phrasal verbs, the components of a prepositional verb should be kept together; one can ask *What did he deal with*? but scarcely *With what did he deal?*

There is a full discussion of prepositional verbs in chapter 4.


## 1.5  Pairings—major and minor members

There are natural **pairings** for some of the most important prepositions whose basic meanings relate to space or time. For each pair one member can be considered **major** and the other **minor**, with the following properties:

  **(i)**    The major member is far more common than the minor one.
  **(ii)**   The major member has a wider range of meanings and grammatical possibilities; it is likely to feature in more phrasal verbs and prepositional verbs than the minor member. Some of the senses of the major member also apply for the minor member, mutatis

mutandis. Other major member senses have no correspondents. The minor member has some independent senses, but rather few (in comparison with those of the major member).

(iii)   In most instances, the basic meaning of the major member is provided with a positive specification, with that of the minor member being, in a rather rough sense, the opposite of this.

The pairings are:

| MAJOR MEMBER | | MINOR MEMBER | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| to | approaching | from | departing | chapter 7 |
| in | enclosed | out | unenclosed | chapter 8 |
| on | connected | off | disconnected | chapter 9 |
| up | high, superior | down | low, inferior | chapter 10 |
| over | relatively higher area | under | relatively lower area | section 11.1a |
| above | relatively higher vertically | below | relatively lower vertically | section 11.1b |
| after | later time | before | earlier time | section 14.4 |

The major and minor members of each pairing can be conjoined, all but one in that order: *to and from*, *in and out*, *on and off*, *up and down*, *over and under*, *above and below*. (Conjunctions in the reverse order do occur but are rare; for example there are almost ninety times as many *up and down* as there are *down and up* in the COCA corpus.) The exception, where the minor member comes first is *before and after* (this is the order which shows temporal sequence).

There are also the idiomatic combinations *ins and outs* 'all the details of a situation' and *ups and downs* 'mixture of good and bad happenings'.

Discussion of the meanings and functions of individual prepositions, in part II, is conducted in terms of these pairings.


## 1.6  Realisation as clitics

A number of short grammatical elements (almost all monosyllabic) although written as if they were distinct words are typically pronounced as clitics. That is, their vowel is reduced, they lose primary stress, and

they attach to a following full word (proclitic) or a preceding full word (enclitic). A clitic boundary is shown by '='. For example:

| WRITTEN | SPOKEN |
|---|---|
| He set her to work | /hi=ˈset=ə tə=ˈwə:k/ |

Whereas the sentence is written as five orthographic works, when spoken it consists of just two phonological words, each centred on a lexical root which bears primary stress (shown by ˈ). To /ˈset/ 'set' is attached the proclitic subject pronoun /hi=/ 'he' and the enclitic object pronoun /=ə/ 'her'. And to /ˈwə:k/ 'work' is attached the proclitic preposition /tə=/ 'to'.

Proclitics include articles, possessive pronouns, subject pronouns, some verbal auxiliaries, and a number of conjunctions. Plus a small selection of prepositions. These are:

| | FULL FORM (STRESSED) | REDUCES TO A PROCLITIC FORM | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | BEFORE A CONSONANT | BEFORE A VOWEL |
| of | /ˈɔv/ | /ə(v)=/ | /(ə)v=/ |
| for | /ˈfɔ:(r)/ | /fə=/ or /f=/ | /fər=/ or /fr=/ |
| at | /ˈat/ | /ət=/ or /ə/=/ | /ət=/ |
| to | /ˈtu:/ | /tə=/ or /t=/ | /tu=/ or /tə=/ |
| from | /ˈfrɔm/ | /frəm=/ or /frm=/ | |
| upon | /əˈpɔn/ | /əpən=/ | |
| with | /ˈwið/ | /wið=/ or /wi=/ | /wið=/ |
| by | /ˈbai/ | /bi=/ or /bə=/ | /bai=/ |

We can see that the proclitic prepositions consist of the four whose basic meaning is relational (*of, for, by, with*) and the three central spatial forms (*at, to, from*) plus *upon* (see section 2.3).

*By* and *with* are only sometimes pronounced as proclitics whereas the other six prepositions invariably are, except in a context of contrast. For example, suppose someone says, with normal proclitic reduction:

(34)    Mary moved from France        /ˈmeri ˈmu:vd frəm=ˈfra:ns
        to Spain                     tə=ˈspein/

However, you may know that this is not true. In correcting it you employ the full stressed forms of *to* and *from* to emphasise places of destination and departure:

(35)   No, Mary moved *to* France   /ˈnou ˈmeri ˈmuvd ˈtu: ˈfra:ns
       *from* Spain                 ˈfrɔm ˈspein/

The possibilities for omitting the NP which follows a preposition (in certain circumstances) are discussed in the next chapter; for example, *She put the shoes on her feet* may be shortened to *She put the shoes on*. It is noteworthy that the six prepositions which are always typically pronounced as clitics belong to the set of prepositions which may not omit a following NP; if this were to be omitted, there would be no following word for the proclitic preposition to attach to. In addition, they do not function as adverbs. The same applies for *with*, which is only sometimes reduced to a proclitic (there is here a non-cognate adverb, *together*). *By* has a minor spatial sense, and this does also function as an adverb.

When a peripheral NP is replaced by a question word, this generally moves to the beginning of the clause. It may take its preposition with it—for example, *At what did John aim?*—or leave it behind—*What did John aim at?* Such a 'stranded' preposition no longer has anything following to which it can cliticise, and it is thus stressed.

Complex prepositions which end in *to* or *of* are also proclitic: *into*, *onto*, *up-to*, *out-of*, *off-of*, as is *upon* (reasons are given in section 2.3 for treating each of these as a single preposition rather than as a sequence of two prepositions). Phrasal prepositions—for example, *in-front-of*, *in-return-for*, *close-to*, *away-from*, and *together-with*—end in a simple preposition which is prototypically a clitic and thus themselves cliticise onto a following NP.

There are many prepositions, both monosyllabic and disyllabic, which do not reduce—*in*, *out*, *on*, *off*, *up*, *down*, *over*, *under*, *about*, among others. All of these may omit a following NP if it could be understood from context. And there are prepositions which may not omit a following NP and which do not have a reduced clitic form; they include *among* and *until/till*.

There is one other kind of clitic which is relevant for the study of prepositions. This is object pronouns which are generally enclitic to the preceding verb. For example *you* may be pronounced as /ˈyu/, with a full vowel and primary stress, in a contrastive context such as: *I didn't say*

*'who' I said 'you'* /ˈai ˈdidnt ˈsei ˈhu: ˈai ˈsed ˈyu/. But it is generally an enclitic /=yə/ attached to the preceding word, as in *Sam likes you* /ˈsam ˈlaiks=yə/.

There are certain circumstances in which a preposition may move to the left over a preceding NP (see section 2.1c). For example *Meg let the cat into the house* may be reduced to *Meg let the cat in*, and then this rejigged to *Meg let in the cat*. However, this left movement is not possible if the NP is a pronoun. One can say *Meg let it in* but not *Meg let in it*. The reason is that an object pronoun is enclitic to its verb:—/ˈlet=it ˈin/ 'let it in'—and neither a preposition nor anything else can intervene between verb and enclitic object pronoun.

## 1.7 Prepositions and adverbs

An adverb is a word which functions on its own (without any following NP) to add meaning to a sentence. Many manner adverbs are derived from adjectives by adding *-ly*; for example, *carefully*, *quickly*, *cleverly*. There are a number of general quantifying adverbs, including *almost*, *possibly*, *really*. The adverbs which concern us here are those relating to space—*away* in *John ran away*—which have properties similar to those of prepositions.

It is often possible to omit an NP following a preposition if its identity is clear from the context. Consider:

(36)    Mark took his hat off the peg
(37)    Mark took his hat off his head

Sentence (37) could be reduced to just *Mark took his hat off* if one were describing what Mark did as he entered church, since it is an expected act in this situation. (In contrast (36) could be reduced to *Mark took his hat off* only in very special circumstances.)

The question now to ask is: since *off* is no longer followed by an NP in *Mark took his hat off*, should it now be considered an adverb (rather than as a preposition)? My answer would be 'no', since a following NP is clearly understood from the situation. This is just a situation-engendered reduction of a prepositional NP.

However, *off* does clearly function as an adverb in:

(38)    Larry ran off

*Around* behaves in a similar way. *Pete just sat around the house yesterday* can, in an appropriate context, be reduced to *Pete just sat around yesterday*. *Around* is still functioning as a preposition; the following NP is not stated but is understood from the context. But *around* does also function as an adverb, as in *The wind veered around*.

With respect to adverb possibilities, prepositions may be classified as follows:

(1) **Function as preposition only, not as adverb**. There is no context-determined omission of a following NP and no adverbial function. These include: *of, for, except, despite, at, to, from, toward(s), among(st), since, until/till*.

(2) **Function as preposition, not really as adverb, but there can be occasional context-determined omission of a following NP**. They have no true adverbial function. These include: *under, above, below, against, beside(s), between*.

(3) **Function equally as preposition and as adverb**. These include: *in, on, off, over, about, around, along*.

(4) **Function primarily as adverb** (with a wide range of senses) **and secondarily as preposition** (with limited spatial reference): *out, up, down*.

(5) **There are a number of other preposition/adverb correspondences**. For example, adverb *together* relates to prepositions *with* and *together with*. And there are compound prepositions based on adverbs, such as:

| ADVERB | PREPOSITION |
|---|---|
| ahead | ahead-of |
| apart | apart-from |
| away | away-from |
| forward(s) | forward(s)-of |

The relationship of prepositions *on*, *onto*, and *upon* with adverb *on*, prepositions *into* and *in* with adverb *in*, and suchlike, are discussed in the first few pages of chapters 8 and 9.

## 1.8 Further functions

There are various, rather limited, possibilities for prepositions undertaking 'double duty'; that is, having a secondary function in some other word class.

(i)   Just a few prepositions also function as **adjectives**; for example: *the outside toilet*, *the down track*, *the above statement*, *(he died in) near poverty*.

(ii)  A noun following such an adjectival-use of preposition may, in appropriate circumstances, be omitted, leaving the preposition-adjective appearing to be head of its NP, superficially behaving like a **noun**. For instance, *Varnish the underneath part of the boat!* can be reduced to *Varnish the underneath of the boat!*

(iii) A handful of prepositions may also function as **verbs**. Alongside *He drank the beer down* one can say *He downed the beer*. And a re-statement of *We were near the finishing point* is *We neared the finishing point*.

(iv)  Just a few prepositions can be used as predicate of an imperative sentence, in each case followed by a *with* phrase:
   - *Out*, as in *Out with it!* (meaning 'Don't keep the news to yourself!')
   - *Off*, as in *Off with you*! (meaning 'Go away!') and *Off with his head!*
   - *Down*, as in *Down with the monarchy!*
   - *Up*, as in *Up with the Rangers!* (when cheering on a sports team)

Perhaps the most notable example of a preposition being used as a verb is when Lady Macbeth attempts to remove the blood from her hand: *Out, damned spot, out, I say* (*Macbeth*, Act 5, scene 1).

(v)   A preposition may be related to a **conjunction,** notably *because-of* and *because*, *but-for* and *but*. *Since* functions as a temporal preposition and as a conjunction indicating 'consequence'; see section 14.1.

(vi)  Two of the relational prepositions (*for* and *by*) and also *to*, whose basic meaning is spatial, **mark grammatical constructions**. In

a passive derivation, the erstwhile agent is marked with *by*, as in *I was bitten by a dog*. The 'potential' variety of complement clauses uses *for* and *to*; for example, *We had hoped for Isaac to be elected* (see sections 2.5c, 5.3d, 6.1c, and 7.2d).

## 1.9 Related prefixes

There are eleven grammatical elements, each of which could function as preposition or as derivational prefix in early stages of English, and they maintain these uses today. In some instances, the verbal derivation can be paraphrased using the corresponding preposition. For example:

| PREFIX | PREPOSITION |
|---|---|
| There was an <u>out</u>-burst of laughter | Laughter burst <u>out</u> |
| An <u>in</u>-house magazine | A magazine only circulated <u>in</u> the house (i.e. company) |
| Phoebe was just an <u>on</u>-looker | Phoebe was just looking <u>on</u> |
| Her <u>off</u>-screen personality was quite different | Her personality was quite different <u>off</u> the screen |
| They live <u>up</u>-river | They live <u>up</u> the river |
| There was a <u>down</u>-pour of rain | The rain poured <u>down</u> |
| She felt mud <u>under</u>-foot | She felt mud <u>under</u> her feet |
| He wore an <u>over</u>-coat | He wore a coat <u>over</u> his clothes |
| There was a <u>through</u>-draught in the room | There was a draught right <u>through</u> the room (between two open windows) |
| I don't believe in an <u>after</u>-life | I don't believe in life <u>after</u> death |
| They are building a <u>by</u>-pass at Slough | They are building a road which passes <u>by</u> Slough (not going through it) |

However, a goodly number of words involving these prefixes have a meaning some way removed from that of the corresponding preposition. Among many others can be mentioned *out-number*, *on-set*, *off-season*, *up-beat*, *down-home*, *under-go*, and *over-shadow*.

An interesting contrast is that between derived verb *over-take* and phrasal verb *take over*:

(39)    Dr Lewis <u>over</u>-took the blue van
            (she drove her car past the van so that she was in front of it)

(40)    Dr Lewis <u>took over</u> the company
            (she bought the company and had control over it)

There is a similar contrast between *over-look* and *look over*.

## 1.10 Endings -*s* and -*st*

In ME there was a suffix -*s* (homonymous with the genitive) which could be added to a noun or adjective to form an adverb or preposition. In some instances a final -*t* was also added, giving -*st*. There are a variety of ways in which this has come through into the modern language:

**(1)**    Preposition *among* has an alternative form *amongst* /əˈmʌŋst/ (see section 12.1).

**(2)**    Preposition/adverb *along* had an alternative form *alongst* /əˈlɔŋst/, which has now pretty well dropped out of use (see section 11.4a).

**(3)**    Preposition *against*, /əˈgenst/ or /əˈgeinst/, included -*st* to distinguish it from adverb *again*, which has the same source (section 9.3).

**(4)**    Preposition *beside* has an alternative form *besides* /bəˈsaidz/ (section 9.4).

**(5)**    Preposition *toward* has an alternative form *towards* /təˈwɔ:dz/ (section 7.3).

There is a phonological principle involved. Where the basic form ends in a nasal, as in (1–3) then -*t* is added after the -*s* on grounds of euphony. However, when the basic form ends in *d*, there is no addition of -*t* (to avoid a sequence -*dst*).

*While* came down to us from OE. In the fourteenth century, it was augmented to become *whiles* (which is now scarcely used), and *whilst* /wailst/, which is a present-day alternative for *while*. The -*st* was here acceptable after the lateral, *l*.

There is one further example. In the seventeenth century, *-st* was added to another form which ends in a nasal, giving *unbeknownst*; this gained general acceptance and is today far commoner than *unbeknown*. (*Unknownst* also made an entry, but the plain *unknown* is preferred here.)

However, there appears to be an exception—preposition *amid* ends in *d* but has an alternative form *amidst* (see section 12.1). The factor here may be the quality of the vowel. The final syllable of *amid* /əˈmid/ has a short stressed vowel /i/ and this may accept a final coda /dst/; the form /əˈmidst/ sounds quite harmonious. In contrast, the stressed final syllables of the words in (4–5) have stronger vowels—a diphthong, in *beside* /bəˈsaid/, and a long vowel, in *toward* /təˈwɔːd/. For these, adding *-st* would produce a word which sounds discordant.

⋆ ⋆ ⋆

The next three chapters, in Part I, outline the grammatical possibilities for prepositions. This sets the stage for the ten chapters of Part II, which feature characterisation of each preposition, these being arranged in semantic sets.

# Part I

The Stage is Set

# 2

# Grammatical roles

## 2.1  Inner and outer peripheral noun phrases

The core components of a clause—subject, predicate, object if the clause is transitive—are obligatory. To these may be added a peripheral NP (pNP)—an NP introduced by a preposition—which is in most cases

optional. The role of the preposition is to indicate the semantic role of its NP; for instance, whether it refers to an instrument, a purpose, an ability, a location, or any of many other possibilities.

Dealing with prepositions in their basic spatial or temporal meanings, there are two kinds of pNP:

- An **inner pNP**, which provides spatial modification of a verb—the meaning of the preposition correlates with the meaning of the verb. The pNP almost always follows the core components of the clause and may, in specific circumstances, omit its NP.
- An **outer pNP**, which provides spatial or temporal modification of a complete sentence. There is no necessary connection between the preposition and the verb of the clause. An outer pNP generally comes at the end of the sentence but can be placed at the beginning. The NP part of the pNP can never be omitted.

### 2.1a  Inner peripheral noun phrases

There are two varieties of inner pNPs:

- **Motion.** One or more pNPs indicating motion may be used with a verb of motion. This is the primary use of prepositions *to*, *toward(s)*, and *from*, as in:

  The boy went from the haystack to the sundial

  Many other prepositions may have a motion sense. For example *She came through the tunnel*, *He jumped over the wall*, *They ran along the path*.

- **Location.** One or more pNPs indicating location may be used with a verb of rest. Besides *at*, quite a number of other prepositions may have a location sense. For example:

  The girl stayed in the kitchen at home

  Also: *He lives behind the school*, *She sat below the window*, *He replaced the top on the canister*.

Some prepositions may indicate either motion or location, depending on the verb they are used with. For instance *under* refers to motion

in *The mouse ran under the table* ('to under') and location in *The mouse hid under the table* ('at under').

### 2.1b  Omission of the noun phrase from an inner peripheral noun phrase

A feature of inner pNPs is that the NP can sometimes be omitted from the pNP. The conditions for this are:

   (i)  **The preposition may not be a clitic**. *To*, *from*, and *at* are proclitic to the following NP; this NP may not be omitted or there would then be nothing for the preposition to attach to.
  (ii)  **The full combination**—core components plus pNP—**must refer to a familiar circumstance**, such that when the NP is omitted its identity will be understood from the context.

If several people are in a dining room, one could say to another: *Please put the cloth on the table!* and then, a couple of hours later: *Please take the cloth off the table!* These are likely to be reduced to: *Please put the cloth on!* and *Please take the cloth off!*, since in this context the normal object which a cloth is put onto, and then taken off from, is understood to be a table.

Suppose a courier comes delivering a parcel, enquires where it should be put and is instructed: *Put the package on the bed!* There is no way in which *the bed* could be omitted here (giving: *Put the package on!*) since putting a package on a bed is not a familiar activity, in the way that putting a cloth on a table is.

A customer entered a bank, went up to a cashier standing on the other side of a counter and wished to withdraw some money. What happened is described by:

> The cashier passed the money over the counter

A cashier passing money over a counter in a bank is a familiar activity, and consequently the NP *the counter* could be omitted here, giving *The cashier passed the money over*. What the money was passed over is understood from the context. In contrast, the final NP is rather unlikely to be omitted from *The cook passed the cake through the window*, since this is not so recurrent an activity as passing money over a counter.

Omission of an NP in a familiar circumstance is found most often with the more common non-proclitic spatial prepositions: *in*, *out*, *on*, *off*, *through*, *over*, *across*, and *around*. It is unlikely with, for example, *behind* and *against*.

### 2.1c  Left movement of preposition or adverb over a preceding noun phrase

If there is an inner pNP following a transitive verb, and the NP is omitted from the pNP under circumstances just described, the preposition may optionally move to the left of the object NP of the transitive verb. (As mentioned in section 1.6 this is not possible if the object NP is a pronoun, since an object pronoun is enclitic to the preceding verb and cannot be detached from it.) Thus:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| He put the cloth on (the table) | → | He put on the cloth |
| He took the cloth off (the table) | → | He took off the cloth |
| He put the hat on (his head) | → | He put on the hat |
| She passed the money over (the counter) | → | She passed over the money |

Some grammarians would maintain that once its following NP is omitted, the preposition becomes an adverb and the rule is then that an adverb can be moved over a preceding object NP. (This is essentially a matter of terminology and does not alter the facts.) My view is that, since the reference of the omitted NP is understood, the preposition maintains this function.

Spatial adverbs have a similar role to inner pNPs and do also undergo left movement. For example:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| He threw the rubbish away | → | He threw away the rubbish |
| She couldn't tell the twins apart | → | She couldn't tell apart the twins |

Movement of a spatial preposition or adverb over a preceding object NP is rather unexpected, in the context of the overall grammatical organisation of the language. Generally, a manner adverb—something like *quickly* or *carefully* or *cleverly*—can be placed at the end or at the beginning of a sentence, or before the verb (or after the first word of a multi-verb VP), but not between verb and object. One may say *He put his hat on his head quickly* or *Quickly he put his hat on his head* or *He*

*quickly put his hat on his head* but not *\*He put quickly his hat on his head*. It is thus somewhat surprising that *on* can move to precede *his hat*, giving: *He put on his hat*.

The explanation is that an inner pNP is determined by the meaning of the verb. When the NP of the pNP has been omitted (under circumstances where its reference is clear) and the preposition is left unencumbered, it may naturally be moved to the left—over the object NP—so that it is adjacent to the verb with which it is associated.

There is one point of difference between a preposition when following and when preceding an object NP. As discussed in section 2.6, there are limited possibilities for modification of a preposition; a common modifier is *right*, as in:

He took the cloth right off (the table)

When the preposition is moved to the left, it cannot take its modifier with it. That is, one can say *He took off the cloth*, but not *\*He took right off the cloth*. The close association between verb and preposition which is established by left movement may not be interrupted by a modifier.

We have been discussing inner NPs involving prepositions used in their basic spatial senses. More abstract meanings are an extension from these, as are the uses of prepositions in phrasal verbs. Left movement of a preposition also happens here. There is discussion in section 3.5 of factors influencing its application.

### 2.1d  Outer peripheral noun phrases

Most types of activity are located in some place and at some time. This can be specified by a selection of outer pNPs. The difference from inner pNPs is that there is no association between the verb of the sentence and the outer pNPs. Whereas an inner pNP augments the reference of the verb, an outer pNP relates to the complete sentence, locating the activity it describes in space and time.

For example, we can describe a few happenings, chosen pretty well at random:

| | |
|---|---|
| Jack broke the plate | Jill ate the mango |
| Robin proved the theorem | Fred admitted his guilt |
| Jane likes to exercise | Jason complained about his liver |

To each of these core clauses (and to an indefinite number more) can be added one or more spatial and/or temporal pNPs, such as:

> in the garden at the vicarage at ten o'clock on Monday

or  before breakfast under the oak tree beyond the shed

The complete sentence must be plausible but—unlike for inner pNPs—there is no particular association between the preposition and the meaning of the verb.

There are significant differences between the two varieties of pNP:

  **(i)  Prepositions involved**
   - An inner pNP only relates to space (motion or location) and can be marked by any preposition which has a spatial sense.
   - An outer pNP specifies space or time and can be marked by any preposition which has a location (not motion) or a temporal sense. Thus, the main motion prepositions—*to*, *from*, and also *toward(s)*—only occur in inner, never in outer, pNPs. Note though that *at* is used in both varieties.
   - The relational prepositions—*of*, *for*, and *with*—have grammatical functions and do not feature in outer pNPs. *By* does have a minor spatial sense so that it can occur in both inner and outer pNPs.
  **(ii)  Possibility of reduction.** Unlike an inner pNP, an outer pNP cannot omit its NP; there is thus no possibility of left movement of the preposition over a preceding transitive object NP.
 **(iii)  Placement.** An inner pNP is generally placed after the verb (plus the object NP if it has one). With just a few prepositions, the pNP may come at the beginning of the clause but only in a contrived poetic-like style. For example: *Over the counter, the cashier passed the money* and *Across the lawn, the rabbit ran.*

An outer pNP most often follows the core components of a clause but it can, fairly freely, precede them. Or there can be one or more pNPs before and other(s) after. Consider:

Jack broke the plate [in the garden] [at the pub] [at noon] [on Monday]

<div align="center">1       2       3</div>

The two spatial outer pNPs are linked—the garden is at the pub—as are the two temporal outer pNPs—noon is on Monday—and cannot be separated. Nor should spatial and temporal pNPs be interspersed.

The two spatial pNPs, 2, could either precede or follow the temporal pNPs, 3. Either or both of 2 and 3 could precede the clausal core, 1, in either order. That is, we could have 123, or 132, or 231, or 321, or 213, or 312.

## 2.2 Preposition stranding

There are several grammatical operations which affect the position or the integrity of a pNP. One of the most frequent consists in questioning the NP component of a pNP. The question word is generally moved to the beginning of the clause and either (a) it may leave its preposition behind, or (b) it may take it with it.

We can start with a straightforward statement:

Sylvia is living with friends

It would be possible to just substitute *who* for *friends*, creating an 'echo question': *Sylvia is living with who?* But the more normal practice is to move the question word (here *who*) to the beginning of the sentence. There are the two possibilities.

(a)  Fronting who and leaving the preposition in its original position (it is then said to be 'stranded'):

Who is Sylvia living with?

(b)  Fronting the entire pNP; that is, the preposition plus *who*:

With whom is Sylvia living?

The same two possibilities apply for relative clause formation:

(a)  The friends [who Sylvia is living with] come from Birmingham
(b)  The friends [with whom Sylvia is living] come from Birmingham

Note that the same alternatives apply for questioning, for relative clause constructions and for other techniques for fronting all or part of a pNP.

In some circumstances—as in the examples just quoted—(a) and (b) are equally acceptable. In others, one possibility is good and the other either unacceptable or marginal. This can be roughly summarised in a table: