

## **PREPOSITIONS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND ITS TYPES**

Uktamova Mohigul Khamidullo kizi

Fergana state university, EFL teacher

[uktamovamoxigul@gmail.com](mailto:uktamovamoxigul@gmail.com)

Muqimova Odinaxon Xayrullo qizi

Fergana State University, student of 4<sup>th</sup> course

[muqimovaodina@gmail.com](mailto:muqimovaodina@gmail.com)

**ABSTRACT.** Prepositions connect nouns by allowing writers to create complex sentences. Prepositions show the relationship between nouns by modifying the noun that follows them also called the object of the preposition. Together, a preposition and its object are called a prepositional phrase. For example, if a writer needs to discuss a book on a table. He or she needs to use the following sentence: The book lies on a preposition the table the object of the preposition. Anyone reading the sentence needs to know where the book is located, so the preposition on connects the table (a second noun) to the book.

**KEYWORDS:** preposition, words, nouns, pronouns, pronouns,

A preposition is traditionally defined as a “closed class of uninflectable morphemes showing the link between its object and another word in the sentence”. Right away, the fundamentally relational role of prepositions can be retained as a defining feature. Yet, as Huddleston and Pullum note (2002: 598)<sup>40</sup>, traditional grammar tends to reduce the definition of prepositions to their grammaticised use, which is for prepositions to assign cases to the nouns or pronouns following them. A classical assumption derived from this simplified definition of prepositions being followed only by noun phrases, is that prepositions are heads of phrases while conjunctions are heads of clauses. This is erroneous, since prepositions can take clauses as complements:

(1) *He vanished on hearing her come in.*

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<sup>40</sup> HUDDLESTON, Rodney D. and Pullum Geoffrey K. *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

(2) *Tom panicked about whether he would arrive in time for the meeting.*

Prototypical members of the preposition category are: *about, above, across, after, along, around, before, behind, between, by, down, in, off, on, out, over, through, to, under, up*. A diachronic study of their semantics, which will not be carried here, shows that their meanings originally have to do with relations in space, or time. Huddleston and Pullum, in their comprehensive descriptive approach to grammar, choose a broader definition of prepositions, as heads of prepositional phrases with specific characteristics: We include in the preposition category all of the subordinating conjunctions of traditional grammar, with three exceptions: *whether, if* with the meaning of *whether*, and *that* introducing a subordinating clause; since these markers indicate subordination, they are not heads of the constructions in which they are found. (Huddleston, 2002: 600)<sup>41</sup> Huddleston and Pullum note that a number of the most central and frequent prepositions do have grammaticised uses although they cannot be reduced to that. In a grammatical use, the preposition has no meaning independent of the grammatical construction in which it occurs. In such cases it serves the same kind of function as an inflectional case.

Compare:

(3) *They destroyed the city.*

(4) *Their destruction of the city.*

The main role played by *of* is that of a relator of the two NPs.

(5) *He was arrested by the police.*

(6) *I left the parcel by the back door.*

The first *by* is clearly grammaticised, it is used merely to introduce the agent in a passive structure, while the second *by* has a spatial meaning. Prepositions prototypically take complements, which are prototypically NPs, but not exclusively. A preposition can also receive as a complement non-expandable content clause, that is, a clause which cannot receive a modification by a dependent *that*-clause.

(7) *I live in a small house.*

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<sup>41</sup> HUDDLESTON, Rodney D. and Pullum Geoffrey K. *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

(8) *We left before the meeting ended. Non-expandable content clause.*

A prepositional phrase can function as an adjunct or a complement:

compare:

(9) *I disagree on principle.*

*Complement (why I disagree is on principle).*

(10) *I disagree, in principle. Adjunct (In principle, I disagree).*

As a complement, a PP can complement a verb, compare:

(11) *I put the box in the drawer.*

(12) *I put the box.*

It can also be a qualifier inside a nominal group, complementing a noun:

(13) *The hole in the wall.*

(Compare with a restrictive relative clause; the PP here could be likened to a small clause, an elliptic restrictive relative clause). Prepositions can receive as modifiers *right* or *straight*, which cannot modify verbs, adverbs or adjectives (in Standard English).

(14) *They pushed it right under the bed.*

(15) *\*/? They were right enjoying themselves.*

## B. Prepositions as an open class

Far from being a closed class, the class of prepositions counts in new members through the diachronic process of grammaticalization. In their *Introduction to Functional Grammar*, Halliday and Matthiesen (Halliday, 2004: 359)<sup>42</sup> lay emphasis on the distinction between a preposition group and a preposition phrase. Preposition groups are complex prepositions which have evolved from prepositional phrases through a process of grammaticalization, such as *for the sake of*. Many expressions lie just in between the two, such as *by the side of*, *as an alternative to*, *on the grounds of*.

## C. Prepositions contrasted with other word categories

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<sup>42</sup> HALLIDAY, Michael A.K. and Matthiesen Christian M.I.M. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* 1994. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. (third edition).

Here is a series of examples of diverse uses of *up*, adapted from Elisabeth O’Dowd , and their likely traditional analyses: (16) *She’ll try to climb up your leg, man.* *Up* is a preposition.

(17) *And I’m going to clean up the mess?*

*Up* is an adverbial particle, adding a spatial or (metaphorically derived from spatial) meaning to *clean* (see last section for more explanation), but the meaning of *clean* remains intact<sup>43</sup>.

(18) *After relentless efforts, Mary decided to give up trying to convince him.* *Up* is an adverbial particle, altering the meaning of *give*.

(19) *There used to be a place up in Toledo where...*

*Up* is an adverb, functioning as an adjunct to the verb.

(20) *Now that’s a bunch of really high up people.* *Up* is an adjective.

It does not take long to note the obvious permeability between preposition as a class and many other classes of words. They need comparing and contrasting.

## **CONCLUSION**

Prepositions may seem like small, insignificant words, but they play a crucial role in constructing meaningful sentences and conveying precise relationships between ideas. Their importance becomes even more evident when we consider the challenges they present, especially for language learners navigating idiomatic expressions and subtle differences in usage.

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<sup>43</sup> BOLINGER, Dwight. *The Phrasal Verb in English*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.

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