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THE ROLE OF PREPOSITIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN THE STRUCTURE OF CONTEXT

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Abstract: Besides laying the foundation for the syntactic and semantic categories used in connection with the analysis, this chapter also aims to show that acquiring the syntactic structure and function as well as the semantic meaning of prepositions in English is a complex task. The article presents theoretical ideas in this regard and proves them with examples.

Keywords: semantic; grammar; complements; outrageous; non-canonical; grammaticized; syntax; morphological.

In this section presented and discussed the definition and approach to prepositions generally held by generative frameworks of grammar, more specifically the one presented in Huddleston and Pullum (2002), which is adopted in this study. I present a general overview of the internal and external syntax of prepositions within the generative framework and present the major syntactic categories most relevant to the present study more extensively. Furthermore, an account of the semantic aspects of English prepositions are described. Also here, I elaborate on the semantic categories that are most relevant in relation to the data sample in more detail than the others. Besides laying the foundation for the syntactic and semantic categories used in connection with the analysis, this chapter also aims to show that acquiring the syntactic structure and function as well as the semantic meaning of prepositions in English is a complex task. There are different approaches to and definitions of prepositions depending on theoretical tradition. In this study, I have adopted a definition that allows for inclusion of a broader range of elements than in traditional grammars. According to generative approaches to grammar, prepositions head prepositional phrases that take various kinds of dependents. The reasoning is among other things that prepositions can take modifiers that are also found in noun, verb and adjective phrases e.g. two years after their divorce and very much in control. Two years are also found in adjective phrases as in: two years old, and very much in noun phrases as in very much a leader. Moreover, prepositions take several other constructions as complements in addition to the most typical case, i.e. noun phrases, e.g. adverb phrases, adjective phrases or interrogative clauses. In addition, one PP may be embedded within another just like noun phrases and clauses. Different prepositions, like nouns, verbs and adjectives, license different types of complements. The typical preposition takes a noun phrase as complement *in the garden and to Paris*. The noun phrases the garden and Paris above, are objects, and so the prepositions in and to are transitive. The transitive preposition in above can also be intransitive, i.e. be used without an object, in examples like: *she stayed in*. Moreover, the distinction in clause structure between predicative complement and object applies also to PP structure. The typical preposition that licenses a predicative complement is as. is an example of a PP functioning as predicative complement: *I regard their behavior as outrageous*. Here, outrageous has a predicative function with him as predicand. In the complement use, the preposition as is selected by the verb regard. As previously mentioned, the definition of prepositions adopted here includes a broader spectrum of words

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than the traditional definition. Although most traditional grammars accept that certain prepositions can take the various complements mentioned above, they do not allow declarative content clauses, in which case the words that are otherwise considered prepositions are labeled markers of subordination, i.e. subordinating conjunctions as in example: *It depends on whether he saw her* Furthermore, traditional grammar does not allow prepositions to occur without a complement as with in above. Instead of intransitive prepositions, these instances are considered adverbs. However, all of the instances that traditional grammar label subordinating conjunctions, such as above, are here labeled prepositions and seen as heading the constructions in which they figure, except whether, if when used for whether and that when introducing a subordinate clause. Furthermore, as prepositions are considered heads similarly to nouns, verbs and adjectives, there is no reason to claim that they cannot occur without complements as the presence or absence of a complement does not affect the head function in either of the other phrase constructions. A number of prepositions have grammaticized uses, which means they have no semantic content. They only serve to indicate the function of their complements: (1) They were mourning the death of their king

(2) He was interviewed by the police

Serving as examples of this, of in (1) is the head of the PP complement in a noun phrase that corresponds to the clausal equivalent their king died. by in (2) marks the element that corresponds to the subject in an equivalent active construction. Grammaticized uses are often equivalent to inflectional case functions seen in e.g. the death of the king versus the kingṛs death. The traditional definition fits the grammaticized uses of prepositions well, as these do not take modifiers and predominantly occur with noun phrase complements. However, there are a number of prepositions that do not have grammaticized uses and those I have mentioned that do, also have non-grammaticized uses, and so the traditional definition is not sufficiently broad to encompass this entire spectrum. Traditional grammars have pointed out that prepositions tend to precede their complements as a distinguishing factor. Although there are a few minor exceptions such as notwithstanding, this is indeed the case in canonical constructions. However, there are certain non-canonical constructions such as open interrogatives (3), in which the preposition is said to be stranded:

(3) Who are they doing it for?

Here, the prepositional complement is missing from its default position after the preposition for but is still considered a preposition. However, the complement is to be found in pre-nuclear position in the form of a relative clause who. Despite these exceptions, traditional prepositions in canonical constructions do always precede their complements. However, this is also true in the case of verbs, adjectives and adverbs and so, this is not to be considered a distinguishing characteristic of prepositions either. According to the present approach, prepositions are a closed class compared to nouns, verbs and adjectives. Although some are added from time to time, they are far fewer in number and there is no freely productive morphological process for forming them. Furthermore, typical prepositions denote or originate in notions of space. The resulting definition of prepositions proposed by Huddleston and Pullum that is adopted here is the following: "a relatively closed grammatically distinct class of words whose most central members characteristically express spatial relations or serve to mark various syntactic functions and semantic roles". In relation to the present study, I adopt this definition and the generative approach to prepositions because, as previously stated, this enables me to include

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instances of non-target prepositions in the corpus that could potentially have been disregarded if adopting the traditional definition. Consequently, as the exact working definition adopted by the corpus compilers is unknown, I adopt the definition that allows me to include as many instances as possible.

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