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Remarks on the category 'preposition' in corpus based account: Quirk et al. 1985

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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach
dozwolonego użytku.

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1. Subcategorization by function

Prepositions constitute an integral part of the language system and are analyzed and characterized according to different criteria. In one of the most representative grammars ‘*A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*’ by Randolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech, Jan Svartvik the term **preposition** covers a wide range of language categories some of which are categorized traditionally as adjectives, verbs, conjunctions. The motivation for such a broad definition of the term **preposition** apparently stems from the assumption that a preposition can be defined syntactically, as well as functionally ...’ a relation between two entities, one being that represented by the prepositional complement, the other by another part of the sentence’¹.

The internal structure of so diversified category is systematized according to functional and syntactic parameters. Central prepositions are defined by three criteria; they cannot have as a complement (i) a that-clause, (ii) an infinitive clause and (iii) a subjective case form of a personal pronoun. The words whose syntactic function indicates that they behave like prepositions, but morphologically resemble other word classes like verbs or adjectives belong to the subcategory marginal prepositions. Interestingly, although Quirk et al.(1985) do not explicate the point, language data (1), (2), (3) imply that marginal prepositions also satisfy the criteria (i) – (iii).

1. *Granted his obsequious manner, I still think he’s ambitious enough to do the job.*
2. *He gave Mary all bar [‘except’] three of the sketches.*
3. *Two gold-hilted swords, each worth £10,000, were sold at Sotheby’s last Monday.*²

¹ R. Quirk, S. Greenbaum, G. Leech, J. Svartvik, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, Longman, London–New York 1985, s. 657.

² R. Quirk, S. Greenbaum, G. Leech, J. Svartvik, op. cit., s. 667.

This, in turn, posits the question what is there in the syntactic context that 'turns' verbs and adjectives into prepositions. The syntactic-functional criteria have led Quirk et al.³ to placing conjunctions and participles among members of the category preposition, more precisely, as I understand it, marginal prepositions. Both categories fulfill a relating and connecting function. *Before* is a good example. In the phrase *The day before she arrived*, *before* is a conjunction because it introduces a subordinate clause. In *The day before her arrival* it is a preposition because it introduces nominal complementation.

Moreover, some *-ing* and *-ed* participial forms function either as prepositions, as nonfinite verb forms or as conjunctions. The following examples show three different functions of the word *considering*.

4a. *Considering his age, he has made excellent progress in his studies.*

4b. *Considering the conditions in the office, she thought it wise not to apply for the job.*

4c. *Considering that he is rather young, his parents have advised him not to apply.*

In sentence (4a) *considering* is a preposition 'if one considers his age', in (4b) it is a participle 'when she considered the conditions' and in (4c) it has the function of a conjunction.⁴

What is worth adding is the interdependence between the function of the language expression and its syntactic context in (4a).

A problem with the subcategorization into central and marginal, although Quirk et al. do not explicate it, seems to be related to the issue of functional indeterminacy of category members which can be used as either preposition or adverbs. Identical morphological structure of *up* in (5a) and (5b) contributes to ambiguity and causes difficulty in differentiating between these two grammatical categories, as shown in the examples:

5a. *She looked up the hill.* 5b. *She looked up the word.*

In (5a) *up* is a preposition with its complement and in (5b) *up* is an adverb particle in a phrasal verb *look up* with a possible change in word order *She looked the word up*.

What should be stressed is that in both (5a) and (5b) *up* seems to occur in the same syntactic environment, i. e., is followed by a NP. Still, Quirk et al. argue that in (5b) *up* is an adverb particle of the phrasal verb *look up* on the ground that *up* can be moved to follow the NP (positional mobility). This, in turn, suggests that the NP 'the word' should not be analyzed as a prepositional complement but the verb complement, which seems to explain why *up* in (5b) cannot be subcategorized as a central preposition.⁵

2. Subcategorization by morphology

According to their morphological structure, prepositions are viewed as simple (one word prepositions) and complex (consisting of two or more words). The division into simple and complex prepositions is not always elucidated. The differentiation has been made according

³ R. Quirk, S. Greenbaum, G. Leech, J. Svartvik, op. cit., s. 660.

⁴ R. Quirk, S. Greenbaum, G. Leech, J. Svartvik, op. cit., s. 662.

⁵ In (4c) the criteria (i) – (iii) are not satisfied, whereas in (4b) the complement is nominal (NP) but *considering* is a non-finite clause verbal element, as its implied subject is the same as main clause subject.

to orthographic criterion. Nevertheless, the category membership of some prepositions is ambiguous e.g. *into*, *within*, *without* are simple prepositions but *out of*, *up to* are complex prepositions. There are 72 simple prepositions which are subdivided into 29 monosyllabic and 43 polysyllabic ones. The group of complex prepositions consists of two-word sequences and three-word sequences. In the subcategory of two-word prepositions, the first element is usually an adverb, adjective and conjunction, and the second element is a simple preposition. The most representative group among 43 two-word prepositions is the group of 17 with preposition *to* as the second element. These are: (6) *according to*, *as to*, *close to*, *contrary to*, *due to*, *near(er) to*, *next to*, *on to* [onto], *owing to*, *preliminary to*, *preparatory to*, *previous to*, *prior to*, *pursuant to*, *subsequent to*, *thanks to*, *up to*.⁶

The second biggest group consists of 15 two-word prepositions with *of* as the second element. These are: (7) *ahead of*, *as of*, *back of*, *because of*, *exclusive of*, *devoid of*, *instead of*, *inside of*, *off*, *irrespective of*, *outside of*, *out of*, *upwards of*, *regardless of*, *void of*.

Preposition *from* is present in the group of 4 two-word prepositions: *apart from*, *away from*, *aside from*, *as from*. 3 two-word prepositions are formed by preposition *for*: *as for*, *except for*, *but for*. There are 2 two-word prepositions with preposition *with*: *along with*, *together with*.

There are 2 more two-word prepositions: *up against* and *as per*.

Three-word complex prepositions appear in an impressive number of 54, what makes the category the most numerous; 53 of them are of the pattern **preposition** + noun + **preposition**. The biggest group of 20 prepositions constitute the combination **in** + noun + **of**: *in aid of*, *in back of*, *in behalf of* <AmE>, *in case of*, *in charge of*, *in consequence of*, *in (the) face of*, *in favour of*, *in front of*, *in (the) light of*, *in lieu of*, *in need of*, *in place of*, *in (the) process of*, *in quest of*, *in respect of*, *in search of*, *in spite of*, *in view of*, *in terms of*.

There are two groups of three-word prepositions represented by two preposition patterns: **in** + noun + **with**: *in accordance with*, *in comparison with*, *in conformity with*, *in line with*, *in common with*, *in compliance with*, *in contact with*, and **on** + noun + **of**: *on account of*, *on (the) grounds of*, *on pain of*, *on the strength of*, *on behalf of*, *on the matter of*, *on the part of*, *on top of*.

Four examples of the combination **by** + noun + **of** are presented: *by dint of*, *by virtue of*, *by means of*, *by way of*. Fourteen three-word sequences do not follow any of the mentioned combinations. These are: *as far as*, *at variance with*, *at expense of*, *at the hands of*, *for (the) sake of*, *for/from want of*, *in addition to*, *in return for*, *with/in regard to*, *in relation to*, *with/in respect to*, *with/in reference to*, *with the exception of*.

3. Subcategorization by usage

Quirk et al. discuss prepositions according to their prepositional uses. Four main subcategories of the uses are labelled: **space**, **time**, **cause** and **instrument**.

Basic space prepositions are analysed by three parameters: (i) dimension, (ii) type of relation, (iii) positive/negative. The first parameter, dimension, characterises space

⁶ R. Quirk, S. Greenbaum, G. Leech, J. Svartvik, op. cit., s. 669.

prepositions as type -0 when the relation arises at a point e.g. *at the cottage*. Prepositions of type 0 are: *to, at, (away)from, away from*. In type-1 the relation is viewed as a line e.g. *Our cottage is on that road*. Prepositions of type-1 are *on(to), on, off*. Type-2 prepositions define a relation as an area e.g. *There is some ice on that road*. Prepositions type-2 are: *on(to), on, off, in(to), in, out of*. Prepositions of type-1 and type-2 exist as two-dimensional surfaces. Prepositions of type-3 relate to three-dimensional objects. Eg. *There are only two beds in the cottage*. Type-3 prepositions are: *in(to), in, out of*.

As far as the second parameter, type of relation, is concerned basic space prepositions are classified in terms of a cause-and-effect relationship between static location (position) and movement towards a location (destination). The static position is always a result of movement which leads to destination.

E.g. destination result position

Ann went to Oxford → Ann was at Oxford

The analysis of the relation types implies that prepositional uses are a projection of stative – dynamic verbs. The third parameter, positive vs. negative, is not elucidated. It is only implied that negative space prepositions are ‘created’ by adding ‘not’ to the positive ones. E.g. [*not at*] = *away from*, [*not on*] = *off*

It can be assumed that the third parameter gives some hints as far as the possibility to evaluate basic space prepositions axiologically is concerned. Within the subcategory of **space** prepositions, apart from basic space prepositions, there is a group **relative** prepositions whose function is to determine relative position between two objects or groups of objects, whether objective or subjective. Relative prepositions are placed on the vertical axis and horizontal axis. Vertical relations are expressed by *above, over, on top of, under, underneath, beneath, below* and horizontal relations are represented by *in front of, before, behind* and *after*. Interestingly, prepositions expressing vertical relations outnumber the horizontal prepositions.

The subcategory space prepositions comprises also prepositions which are not classified as basic or relative. Nevertheless, they belong to the category space prepositions under the label **other space prepositions**. Although Quirk et al. do not explicate it, these are prepositions which do not satisfy all parameters of basic space prepositions and they do not determine relations in terms of vertical or horizontal orientation. **Other space prepositions** are: *by, beside, with, near (to), close to, opposite, between, among, amongst, amid, amidst*. Surprisingly, also some prepositions formerly classified as relative i.e. *over, under, behind* etc. are placed within the subcategory **other space prepositions**. The problem arises because of multiple functions of these prepositions. Relative function is only one of many functions of these prepositions. As an example, eight functional uses of preposition *over* are presented: Position: *A lamp hung over the door*. Destination: *They threw a blanket over her*. Passage: *They climbed over the wall*. Orientation: *They live over the road*. Resultative: *At last we were over the crest of the hill*. Pervasive [static]: *Leaves lay thick (all) over the ground*. Pervasive [motion]: *They splashed water (all) over me*. Accompanying circumstances: *We discussed it over a glass of wine.*⁷

⁷ R. Quirk, S. Greenbaum, G. Leech, J. Svartvik, op. cit., s. 686.

Surprisingly enough, the metaphorical use of preposition *over*, as well as of some other prepositions, is discussed separately and is not included in the eight uses of *over*. E. g. *We are over the worst*. Prepositions denoting **time** constitute another subcategory within the category of functional uses of prepositions. Syntactically, they are adjuncts, postmodifiers or predication adjuncts. The subcategory time prepositions is characterised according to six use parameters:

Time position: *at, on, in, by*

Measurement into the future: *in*

Duration (i): *for, during, over, (all) through, throughout*

Duration (ii): *from...to, until, up to*

Other time prepositions

Absence of time prepositions in some expressions denoting time.

Time position prepositions are viewed as parallel to positive prepositions of position. *At* denotes point in time or period of time. There is a lot of indeterminacy in classifying time prepositions of duration. They are presented in two groups: duration (i) and duration (ii). In the first group there are prepositions which answer the question How long? Nevertheless, it does not seem to be a satisfying criterion for separating duration prepositions into two groups. Prepositions *from...to, until, up to* answer that question as well.

The group of other time prepositions consists of prepositions which syntactically function either as prepositions or as conjunctions i.e. *before, after, since, till, until*. It is the syntactic context that defines the category of these words. The subcategory time prepositions includes also time expressions where preposition is absent and its function has a time adverbial. E.g. *I'll mention it next time*.

Cause is the next subcategory of prepositional uses. Quirk et al. enlist the prepositional uses in that subcategory: cause, reason, motive, purpose, destination and target. As it is stated, the first three, cause, reason and motive are expressed among others by prepositions *because of, on account of, for, from* and are defined as the ones which answer the question Why? However, it occurs that the prepositional use changes when the syntactic context of a preposition changes. For example *for* in *He'll do anything for money* is used to express purpose. With certain verbs it expresses destination e.g. *He set out for London*. In contexts where *for* is followed by an animate noun phrase, its use changes into the one expressing target.

The subcategory of **instrument** is represented by two prepositions: *with* and *by*. *By* is used to express 'by means of' or in passive sentences is used to denote agent. *With* has the instrumental use as in the example *Someone had broken the window with a stone*. However, *with* is one of the prepositions which has multiple uses and functions and then it cannot be categorised as a member of only one category. It is used to express manner in *She performed the operation with great skill*, accompaniment in *I'm so glad you're coming with us*, support in *Remember that everyone of us is with you*. In phrases like *a man with a red nose*, the preposition expresses a kind of 'possession', in *with all this noise I managed to get some sleep* the preposition has a concessive function. *With* is also categorised as the preposition of ingredient e.g. *This cake is made with lots of eggs*.

3. Discussion

The multiple functions of a single preposition cause categorisation problems and uncover the insufficiency of categorising criteria.

In the first section of the article the categorisation of prepositions is done on the basis of the syntactic function. The three criteria (i) – (iii) help distinguish prepositions from other word categories. Nevertheless, the question arises why Quirk et al. do not categorise all the words satisfying the three criteria definitely as one category preposition. Morphological structure of the words categorised as marginal prepositions indicates their attachment to other word classes like verbs, adjectives, conjunctions. Syntactically, these words are categorised as prepositions. What motivates the category change? If it is the syntactic context they appear in, it is then another factor that should be analysed before categorisation is postulated.

The second section examines the morphological structure of simple and complex prepositions. Interestingly, the category ‘complex prepositions’ is dominated by the two-word prepositions with the simple prepositions *to* and *of* as the second element. Three-word prepositions constitute the most numerous group, within which prepositions *in* and *on* dominate as the first element in complex prepositions, and *of* and *with* outnumber other simple prepositions as the second element in the process of creation three-word complex prepositions. The analysis of complex prepositions leads to the conclusion that some simple prepositions are more prolific than others in the creation process. The reason of such a phenomenon can be sought in the semantics of the simple prepositions by means of cognitive grammar tools.

The third section of the article, categorization by usage, divides prepositions into four main usage categories: space, time, cause and instrument. Undoubtedly, there are more than just four usage categories, depending on numerous viewpoints. For example, space prepositions can be subcategorised according to axiological values. Whether they are positive or negative is determined by their position on the axiological scale. An effort should be made to objectify the usage subcategory. Again, the cognitive method could be applied.

Time prepositions is another group that needs recategorization or clarification, especially time prepositions of duration. The distinction between duration prepositions (I) and duration prepositions (II) is not specified. Other time prepositions that syntactically function as prepositions or conjunctions need a closer look. Their categorization as prepositions is motivated by the syntactic context, nevertheless, the syntactic context is not explicitly defined and analysed.

The preposition *with* is a member of a few categories and that motivates analysis based on the thesis that all categories have a linking element, perhaps on the semantic field. Again, cognitive grammar is one of the methods that could help solve the categorisation problems. The semantic value of a preposition is often underestimated.

It seems that syntactic-functional approach does not give a comprehensive explanation of the prepositional meaning and the influence prepositions have on the overall meaning of

a phrase. Cognitive linguistics is an alternative method of investigation of the prepositional meanings. It presents a different perspective, the prepositional meanings are encoded in mental conceptualization of space. The approach presented by Taylor⁸, Turewicz⁹ could be a promising tool for exploring the actual meaning of the prepositions in English.

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⁸ Taylor J., *Cognitive Grammar*, New York, 2002.

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