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Prepositional Phrases and Prepositional Verbs

A Study in Grammatical Function

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PREFACE

The word 'function' in the subtitle of this study refers not to 'the social function of language' but to 'the internal function of elements within the clause', i.e. to such concepts as Time, Location, Beneficient, Experiencer, etc. (for the two uses of the term 'function' in linguistics, see Halliday, 1973: 29). The original source of inspiration behind the work was Chomsky's *Aspects* (1965), and it was only after I had spent some time on problems connected with the description of adverbials in general that my attention was caught by functional ideas such as those set forth in Fillmore's 'The case for case' (1968) or Halliday's 'Notes on transitivity and theme in English' (1967-8). If in 2.1 I appear to be indulging in Chomsky-baiting, I would like to make amends for it here, however. Lyons's (1970: 9) statement that 'Every other "school" of linguistics at the present time tends to define its position in relation to Chomsky's views' certainly covers this study.

This book would not have been possible without the help and advice of the following friends and colleagues:

Professor Knud Sørensen, my supervisor, who has taken a very active interest in the project from the very beginning and through its various stages of completion. Thanks to his keen and penetrating criticisms the number of inaccuracies and inconsistencies has been considerably reduced. Professor Sørensen has also provided some particularly interesting examples from his own collections.

Professor Randolph Quirk, University College, London, who permitted me to use the extensive material of the survey of English Usage, and permitted me to work in the congenial and stimulating atmosphere created by the staff of the Survey Research Room.

Dr. John Anderson, Edinburgh, who helped me clarify my ideas on case relations.

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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Adj	adjective
Adv	adverb(ial)
Aux	auxiliary or *do*
Det	determiner
impS	imperative (form of) S
intS	interrogative (form of) S
N	noun/nominal
Nadj	adjective/adjectival form related to N
Nadv	adverb(ial form) related to N
Nrel	relative pronoun with N as antecedent
negS	negated (form of) S
nomV	nominalisation of V
P	preposition
[P-N]rel	relative pro-adverbial with P-N as antecedent
[P-N]wh	non-relative *wh*-form substituting for P-N
proN	(anaphoric) pronoun substituting for N
pro[P-N]	other pro-adverbials substituting for P-N
pro[(Sb-)V]	pro form substituting for (Sb-)V
proVP	Verb Phrase pro form
S	sentence *minus* the P-N under investigation
Sb	subject
Tns	tense morpheme
v	auxiliary
V	verb
Ven	past participle of V
Vinf	infinitive of V

Ving	present participle of V
Vtr	transitive verb
wh	interrogative pronoun
=, ≠	is related to, is not related to
⊃, ⊅	entails, does not entail
&	coordinating conjunction

In addition, the standard symbols of transformational grammar are used, particularly in 2.1.

Identification of Examples (cf. below p. 9)

CAPS	T. E. B. Howarth, *Culture, Anarchy and the Public Schools* (London: Cassell, 1969)
GW	*The Guardian Weekly*
CRNN	*Costs and Revenue of National Newspapers* (London: HMS, 1970)
JCSG	John le Carré, *A Small Town in Germany* (Pan Books, 1969)
FOA	Gerald Durrell, *My Family and Other Animals* (Penguin Books, 1959)

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PRETHEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the present study we shall be concerned with sentences in which an intransitive verb is accompanied by one or more prepositional phrases. In particular we shall examine the differences in the relationship between the verb and the prepositional phrases in examples like

> (1) [....] it is always *in this sense* that we speak *of "infinite"*
>   *specific heats, etc.*
>   (8a.3.23-1)[1]

The most frequently noted aspect of this difference is the fact that the complement of *of* may occur as the subject of the passive version of (1), whereas the complement of *in* may not. Thus (1')a. is a paraphrase of (1) but (1')b. is not:

> (1')a. "infinite" specific heats, etc. are always spoken of in this sense.
>   b. *this sense is always spoken in of "infinite" specific heats, etc.

Another frequently invoked criterion is the substitutability of a transitive verb for the intransitive verb+preposition, e.g. *discuss/mention* for *speak of,* whereas this possibility does not exist in the case of *speak in.* And this point naturally leads to the observation that the relation between *speak of* and *infinite heats* is parallel to that between a transitive verb and its object, whereas the relation between *speak* and *in this sense* is the relation normally described as verb - adjunct.[2]

   Examples like *speak of* are commonly referred to as prepositional verbs (e.g. Quirk et al, 1972: 811 ff). It is clear, however, that there is no clear-cut border-line between prepositional verb + object on the one hand and verb + prepositional adjunct on the other. Even a cursory glance at the examples of (2) will show that the two shade gradually into one another (cf. Fairclough, 1965; Carvell & Svartvik, 1969; Mitchell, 1958):

(2) a. It's hard to *come by a new job.*
  b. Fred will *pay for the tickets.*
  c. The watch-man *fumbled for his keys.*
  d. The procession *arrived at the Town Hall.*
  e. Ed is *painting with my water colours.*
  f. George *appeared on the appointed day.*
  g. Mike will *disagree in any case.*

In addition to the type already mentioned there are of course also (a) 'double object' prepositional verbs as well as (b) double object transitive-prepositional verbs, e.g. (a) *speak to sbdy about sth;* (b) *provide sbdy with sth, provide sth for sbdy* (see Corder, 1968). Of these only type (a) will be dealt with here. The reason for this is merely practical. If not only cases of intransitive verb+prepositional phrase(s) but also cases of transitive verb+object+prepositional phrase(s) were to be considered, it would have meant an overwhelming increase in the data-collecting phase of the work. Moreover, I believe that the transitive-prepositional type offers no special methodological problems.

The purpose of this study will be to investigate the relations holding between the elements verb (V), preposition (P), and nominal (N) in the italicised parts of such examples as (1) and (2), with special emphasis on cases where V and P are fused to form 'a single transitive verb' (Zandvoort, 1962: 201). Any sequence containing the elements V-P-N will be a candidate for consideration, regardless of order, and for this reason the term CLUSTER will be used (rather than string or sequence). Thus (1) will be said to contain two V-P-N clusters, *speak-in-this sense,* and *speak-of-"infinite" specific heats, etc.* When, in cases where the relation between V-P is closer than that between P-N, we speak of V and P alone, they will be referred to collectively as a (V-P) COMBINATION.

1.2 PREPOSITIONAL VERBS AND RELATED PHENOMENA

The prepositional verb is by no means the only example of that process 'at the border of syntax and morphology' (Bolinger, 1971: 111-12) whereby two (or more) items unite into one new, internally complex item. Examples are found within all three lexical classes 'verb', 'preposition', and 'noun'. Multiword nouns are known as compounds, but since the internal structure of N offers no — theoretical or practical — problems in this context, I shall have no more to say about nominal compounds. This is not the case with complex verbs and prepositions, since obviously one's conception of the distinction between multi-word lexical items and free syntactic construction is crucial

when it comes to deciding whether some or any of the examples in (3)-(4) contain examples of V-P-N clusters.

(3) a. His conduct *gave rise* to some misunderstanding.
  b. These words may *give offence* to some people.
  c. The cave *gave shelter* to the wanderer.
  d. The old lady *gave her money* to the poor.
(4) a. The cat stayed *in front of* the gate.
  b. The cat sat *to the left of* the gate.
  c. The cat stayed *behind the bars of* the gate.

1.2.1 *Multi-word verbs*

According to their constituents multi-word verbs apart from prepositional verbs can be divided into three main groups, (i) verb+adverbial particle ('phrasal verb'), (ii) verb+object, (iii) verb+prepositional phrase:

(i)   Our provisions are *running out.*
(ii) These words may *give offence.*
(iii) John has *fallen in love.*

In principle, all three types may function as V in a V-P-N cluster (*we're running out of provisions, these words may give offence to some people, John has fallen in love with Susan*), and I shall thus have no use for the term 'phrasal prepositional' for items like *run out of* (Mitchell, 1958: 106; Quirk et al, 1972: 811), since they will be seen to be no more than one particular type of V-P combination in which the exponent of V is itself a multi-word verb.

   I shall deal first with types (ii)-(iii), and then return to the phrasal verb, which offers special problems.

   As the examples of (3) are intended to show, 'there may well be gradience here rather than a clear-cut dichotomy'[3] (Huddleston, 1971: 86), and I shall arbitrarily regard the criterion that Huddleston (op cit) offers as his criterion (b) as diagnostic:

   The N of a multi-word verb of type (ii) may not be the focus of a
   pseudo-cleft construction (cf. below p. 50)

This places *give shelter* only just outside the class of multi-word verbs of type (ii), and *give offence* inside it:

(5) a. (?) What the cave gave to the wanderer was shelter.
    b. *What the show gave to its audience was offence.

The same criterion can be applied to type (iii), where it will distinguish be-
tween e.g. *arrive at a settlement,* and *come to an understanding*:

(6) a. What they arrived at was a provisional settlement.
    b. *What they came to was a provisional understanding.

I shall rely on this criterion although it is somewhat over-inclusive, and in at
least one case (below p. 157) forces the interpretation 'multi-word verb' upon
a cluster which the descriptive apparatus established in chaps 2-3 is perfectly
capable of handling.

Whereas the only problem with types (ii) and (iii) is that of deciding
whether a particular string is sufficiently fused to deserve the name 'multi-
word verb', the problem with verb+adverbial particle is that of distinguishing
it from verb+preposition. Quite a large number of particles, referred to vari-
ously as 'prepositional adverbs' (Bolinger, 1971: 26) or 'adverb-preposition
words' (Sroka, 1972: 37), may function now as prepositions, now as adverb-
ial particles, e.g. *along, down, in, off, on, through, up.*[4] The clear cases of
prepositional or adverbial function can be distinguished by the fact that ad-
verbial particles may follow an object (and if the object is pronominal,
usually do), whereas prepositions may not (cf. Bolinger, 1971: 10-11). Thus
up is prepositional in (7)a. and adverbial in (7)b.:

(7) a. he lived up the hill ≠ *he lived it up
    b. he looked up the information = he looked it up

In some cases, however, the particle may take on an intermediate function,
in which it belongs partly with the verb (as an adverbial particle), partly with
the object (as a preposition). Bolinger (1971: 26 ff.) names this function
'adprep' and illustrates it by means of the triply ambiguous (8), where *off*
may be interpreted as an adverbial particle (a), as a pure preposition (b), and
as an adprep (c):

(8) She swept off the stage.
    (a) She swept it off. (cleaned it)
    (b) She swept off it. (did her sweeping somewhere not on the stage)
    (c) She swept off it. (departed from it majestically)

Off in (c) is as much a constituent of the phrase *sweep off* as of *off the stage,*

and although the relative position of particle and pronoun 'argues that the particle is a preposition' (op cit p. 27), the adverbial nature of adpreps is brought out by another test:

(9) a. *He ran towards, pell-mell, the first hill he saw.
   b. He ran, pell-mell, towards the first hill he saw.
(10) a. He ran up, pell-mell, the first hill he saw.
   b. He ran, pell-mell, up the first hill he saw.

Towards can only be interpreted as a pure preposition and therefore it may not be separated from its complement. *Up* may in addition be an adprep and tolerate the position of adverbs characteristic of adverbial particles (cf. *he looked up carefully all the words he didn't know*).

In this study particles in adprep function are included among prepositions although their dual nature will force us to give them separate treatment with some of the diagnostics used (see below 6.1.1.1).

1.2.2 *Multi-word prepositions*

There are two types of multi-word prepositions. (i) a three-word type of the pattern P^1-N-P^2, e.g. *in front of, by means of,* (ii) a two-word type, in which the first item is an adverb/conjunction/verb, etc.: *ahead of; out of; because of; owing to; due to.*

Here too there is a gradient from completely fused types to free syntactic constructions (for type (i) cf. Quirk & Mulholland, 1964). At the closed end of the gradient we have such type (i) strings as *by dint of, in lieu of,* where the exponent of N never functions as an independent lexical item; closer to the open end we have strings like *for the benefit of, in the interest of,* which share some properties with free syntactic constructions (cf. *for his benefit, in his interest*) but not all (note e.g. invariability of article, **for a benefit of*). Since this type, like the multi-word verbs of types (ii)-(iii), involves a nominal element, I shall regard the independence of the nominal as diagnostic and use the same criterion. Accordingly *in the interest of* will be seen to be somewhat more tightly fused than *for the benefit of,* although neither of them is a free syntactic construction like e.g. *for the welfare of:*

(11) a. he worked in the interest of the public ≠
   b. *what he worked in was the interest of the public.
(12) a. he worked for the benefit of the public ≠
   b. ? *what he worked for was the benefit of the public.

(13) a. he worked for the welfare of the public =
b. what he worked for was the welfare of the public.

I have dealt with type (ii) elsewhere (Vestergaard, 1973 a) and shall only give
a brief survey here. Its members fall into two subtypes (a) those where the
first element may function both as the P element of a phrasal verb and as a
premodifier of the second element:

(14) he (stared [out) of the window]

(b) others (*owing to,* etc.). Both subtypes should be distinguished from con-
structions where a particle is simply a premodifier of a preposition *(they
live OVER IN Canada),* or where it is simply the P element of a phrasal verb
(he PULLED UP at the traffic lights).
   For subtype (a) the divisibility criterion (see below p. 59) is regarded as
diagnostic; i.e. the two elements of a multi-word preposition of this type may
not be separated by an adverb. The examples of (15) illustrate the gradient:

(15) a. *The scouts rode *ahead* courageously *of* the army
b. ? the steamer throbbed *away* noisily *from* the coast
c. he travelled *back* hurriedly *from* Paris

Owing, no doubt, to the varied class membership of the first element in type
(b) sequences, it is hard to establish one single criterion differentiating be-
tween multi-word items and free constructions, and all I will offer at this
point is a list of the items of this type occurring in the corpus of the present
study: *according to, allowing for, because of, depending on, except for.*
   In addition to these, I know of one sequence which definitely occurs at P
in V-P-N clusters, but which does not fit into any of the types dealt with so
far, viz. *as far as,* cf. *we walked to the station, we walked as far as the station.*

1.3 SOURCES OF DATA

Linguistic data may be elicited in three ways: (a) from a text corpus, (b)
through introspection, (c) from native informants.[5] Each method has a num-
ber of advantages and disadvantages, and for a full description of a linguistic
phenomenon all three should be used.
   Corpus data are of course indispensable in descriptions of actual usage,
i.e. descriptions concerned with such questions as 'how often does this par-
ticular element occur in that position/with that intonation, etc.?', 'are there

stylistic differences in the incidence of element A in position B? '. The use-fulness of corpus data is particularly apparent if the linguist is concerned with registers that he is not familiar with, and, of course, if he is not a native speaker of the language he is studying. Similarly, corpus data may also pro-vide him with information about linguistic facts which he might simply have failed to think of, had he relied on introspection alone. The main disadvan-tages of corpus data are (i) that they provide information only about the overt features of a given phenomenon (e.g. the position, exponence, and in-tonation of an element) but not about its full potential (its covert features). (ii) If the description is corpus bound, the linguist may have to go on indefi-nitely looking for an example illustrating a particular point.

Methods (b), introspection, and (c), informant tests — formal and informal,[6] are closely related. Ideally, any example that the linguist has thought up him-self should be checked with native informants, no matter whether the language under inspection is his native language or not: The linguist's *Sprachgefühl* is likely to become somewhat distorted after long periods of immersion in a problem. On the other hand, the use of informants presupposes introspection on the part of the linguist, since his questions to them will usually have the form 'are sentences A and B similar or dissimilar to each other? ', 'is X a possible form in your language? ', 'are A and B related to each other in the same way as C and D? '. Before the linguist can ask questions like these, he must have formed ideas about the similarity, etc. of the utterances concerned. Accordingly, while data obtained through introspection and information tests lack the advantages of corpus data, the two techniques in combination make up for the disadvantages of corpus data: (i) Information about (aspects of) covert features is obtained through performing certain operations on the original example and then consulting the informants, (ii) the corpus data can be easily, and infinitely, supplemented by making up new examples and pre-senting them to the informants.

In this study all three methods are used. Each of the chapters IV-VIII is divided into two main sections. In the first of these the grammatical poten-tials of the types of V-P-N cluster under consideration are discussed, and here informant controlled introspection is the main source of information, although textual examples are used for illustration whenever convenient. The second section of each of the chapters is concerned with usage, or more precisely, with the incidence of various positional and exponential types among the types of cluster dealt with in the chapter. In those sections only corpus data are used.

It should perhaps be pointed out at this stage that my use of introspection and information tests does not meet the ideal requirement set up above: I have consulted the informants only where I had reason to distrust my own

intuition. Thus I have not bothered my informants with e.g. the relative acceptability of (1')a.-b. above, but I have consulted them about e.g. (11)-(13).

1.3.1 *The corpus*

The corpus data stem from a corpus of about 200,000 words of spoken or written text. It is based in part on the files of the Survey of English Usage, in part on collections of my own. The distribution of the corpus over various registers is tabulated below.

WRITTEN

    (i)   *informative*

        a. learned

            science 8a.3

            arts 8b.1

        b. persuasive . . . . CAPS

        c. press . . . . GW

        d. official . . . . CRNN

    (ii)   *imaginative*

        novels . . . . JCSG

                                     FOA

SPOKEN

    (i)   *recorded non-surreptitiously*

        radio discussions 5b.16

    (ii)   *recorded surreptitiously*

        conversations s.1c.11

                                  s.1c.2

                                  s.1b.6

Table 1.1

Examples from the Survey corpus are identified by means of the number of the relevant slip in the Survey files. Each Survey text consists of about 5,000 words. The sources of the texts are not detectable from the code numbers, but the Survey files will be open to serious students for inspection. The spoken texts are transcribed in a notation explained in Crystal & Quirk (1964).

Since the only prosodic information relevant in this study (cf. below 3.2.1) is the boundaries of the tone groups and pauses, I only retain the following prosodic symbols:

(a) boundary of tone group: *man≠≠*
(b) onset of a tone group: /*man*
(c) pause equivalent to the speaker's rhythm unit: *man-*
(d) pause shorter than - : *man*.

Segmental features are given in their normal orthographic form, if there is one, if not a phonemic transcription (IPA) is resorted to.
The part of the corpus compiled by myself consists of the following texts:

CAPS	T.E.B. Howarth, *Culture, Anarchy and the Public Schools* (London: Cassell, 1969)	35,000 words
GW	*The Guardian Weekly*, Jan. 31, 1970	40,000 "
CRNN	*Costs and Revenue of National Newspapers* (London: HMS, 1970)	15,000 "
JCSG	John le Carré, *A Small Town in Germany* (Pan Books, 1969) pp. 5-105	40,000 "
FOA	Gerald Durrell, *My Family and Other Animals* (Penguin Books, 1959), pp. 9-96	36,000 "

Examples from this part of the corpus are identified by the abbreviation followed by the page number, or, in the case of GW, date, page number and column. Thus (CRNN 12) after an example means that it comes from *Costs and Revenue of National Newspapers,* p. 12; and (GW 31.1.70, 21:4) means that the origin is *The Guardian Weekly,* 31. Jan. 1970, p. 21, column 4. When examples not occurring in the corpus are cited, the full source is given in footnotes.
In several cases I have italicised the relevant parts of an example; italics belonging to the original are marked by [ital] after the (last) italicised word. Interpolations in the original are surrounded by square brackets [ ]. Thus (16) might be rendered as (16'):

(16) It is a sobering, though not altogether fanciful, speculation that the Commissioners may conclude that the trouble with these particular schools is that they are *too* good and are therefore in urgent need of adjustment to enable them to conform more nearly to the average. (CAPS 16)

(16') [. . .] they [sc the public schools] are *too* [ital] good and there-
fore in urgent need of adjustment to enable them to *conform*
more nearly *to the average.* (CAPS 16)

NOTES

1. For the identification of the examples, see below 1.3.1.
2. This formulation actually begs an important question: By saying that there is a re-
lation on the one hand between *speak of* and *infinite heats,* and on the other between
speak and *in this sense,* I have been assuming, too, that there is a direct relation be-
tween *speak* and *of* but not between *speak* and *in.* Although this is a frequently pro-
pounded hypothesis (cf. e.g. Bach, 1967; Chomsky, 1965: 101, 191; Huddleston, 1971:
95; Robinson, 1970: 59-60; Vasiliu, 1968) it has never, to my knowledge, been sub-
jected to empirical verification. Nor shall I attempt to demonstrate it explicitly. Note,
however, that it is only in the later chapters (7 and 8) of this study − i.e. those
dealing with combinations similar to *speak of* − that the criteria dealing specifically
with the relation between V and P (cf. 3.2.2.1) systematically show anything but nega-
tive reactions. Which implies that it is only with these combinations that anything
interesting can be said about the relation between V and P.
3. For the use of the concept of gradience in linguistics, see Quirk (1965) and Carvell
& Svartvik (1969).
4. For this reason Jespersen (1924: 88-9) proposed re-naming Preposition and Adverbial
Particle as 'transitive particle' and 'intransitive particle' respectively.
5. For a fuller discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the three methods, see
Greenbaum (1969: 8-14).
6. The formalised use of informant tests is described by Greenbaum & Quirk (1970).
For this study only informal tests have been used. Partly because the group of informants
available to me was neither large nor homogeneous enough for the purposes of formal
experiments; partly because formal experiments tend to attract a certain amount of
attention to the reaction of the informants in itself, and this aspect does not form
part of the subject matter of this book.

2. OBJECT AND ADJUNCT

In order to make clear what is actually meant by the observation that some prepositional complements are object-like and that some prepositional phrases are adverbial (above 1.1), we shall have to examine in some detail what are the characteristics of the constituents 'object' and 'adjunct', and, more specifically, whether, in terms of syntactic structure,[1] there are different kinds of object and adjunct. If such differences can be found, they might help us to understand why prepositional phrases are felt to be functionally different in the way they are (cf. above, 1.1 [2j a. - g.). These problems form the topic of 2.1.

In a number of fairly recent publications[2] it has been claimed that syntactic (constituent) structure should be seen as a reflection of something else. That is, behind the relations between constituents that can be seen in syntactic structure are some 'deeper' relations which, although they are expressed through syntactic structure, are not directly observable in it.

To take a standard example:

(1) a. Peter bought a car from John
    b. John sold a car to Peter

A constituent analysis would be at a loss to explain that both a. and b. express the same relation between the constituents *Peter, John,* and *a car.* In order to state this fact one might introduce FUNCTIONAL labels saying that in both cases *a car* is an object being transferred, that *Peter* is the goal of the transference and that *John* is the source. The relevance of such a conception of grammar to the problem of describing the relations within V-P-N clusters lies in the possibility of assigning different functional labels to prepositional phrases that are intuitively felt to differ in their relations to V, thereby explaining the basis for the intuition. Syntactic function in this sense will form the topic of 2.2.