

SEMINAR 13B – PREPOSITIONS

- prepositions are a closed class of items connecting two units in a sentence and specifying a relationship between them

e.g. I don't like to drink out of a cracked cup. (the link is to the verb phrase)
He was very grateful for her help. (the link is to an adjective phrase)
The elderly man in the raincoat looks ill. (the link is to a noun phrase)
- a prepositional phrase may act as a postmodifier in noun-phrase structure, or as an adverbial
e.g. *In a few minutes*, we'll know the result of the blood test.
- prepositions may be: a) simple – e.g. at, or, down, during, without, etc.
b) complex – e.g. owing to, by means of, as a result of, etc.
- the complements of prepositions are usually noun phrases, but they can also be non-finite (-ing) clauses, or nominal (wh-) clauses
e.g. *near* the small town
from scrutinizing the results
from where I was sitting

Deferred prepositions

- prepositions are normally followed by their complements, but in certain cases this is not possible, for example
 - a) passive constructions – e.g. We have paid *for the car*. → The car has been paid *for*.
 - b) the prepositional complement is at the beginning of the sentence
e.g. It is unpleasant to work with that man. → That man is unpleasant to work *with*.
It is not worth listening to his advice. → His advice is not worth listening *to*.
 - c) in questions – e.g. What are you looking *at*?
Who is she talking *about*?
Who did you sell your house *to*?
 - d) in relative clauses – e.g. The building (that) you are standing *in front of* was designed by Wren.

Simple prepositions

- monosyllabic items – *at, for, in, on, to, with*; typically unstressed (!) except when they are deferred:
compare: e.g. She looked *at* me. /ət/ v. What are you looking *at*? /ət/
- other simple prep. of more than one syllable: *inside, during, despite, except*

Complex prepositions

- *owing to, away from, because of, etc.*
- *in charge of, by means of, at variance with, in addition to, as a result of, etc.*

Prepositional meanings

- positive v. negative (e.g. *off* = *not on*)
- destination (=movement to an intended location) v. position (static location)
- dimension types – e.g. My coat is *in the wardrobe*.
They were alone *on the tennis court*.

I. SPACE

a) Position and direction

- positive v. negative

e.g. Jack ran *to the corner* and then stood *at the corner*. (positive prepositions)
v. Kate moved *from Bloomsbury* and enjoys living *away from the city centre*.
(negative prep.)

- a point on the route (or institution) v. residence

e.g. Does this train stop *at Lincoln*? v. I've never lived *in Lincoln*.
Our daughter is *at Oxford* studying art. v. They didn't live *in Oxford*.

- surface v. the notion of enclosing

e.g. They were rowing *on Lake Windermere*. v. I was swimming *in Lake Windermere*.

I'll lie *on the bed* for a few minutes. v. There was a child asleep *in the bed*.

b) Relative position

- rather than absolute position, many prepositions indicate the position of something relative to the position of something else:

e.g. The police station is *opposite my house*.
My house is *opposite the police station*.

- some prepositions form antonymic pairs (one is the opposite of the other)

e.g. *above* v. *below*
over v. *under* (=directly above, directly below)
in front of v. *behind*
before v. *after*

- like *under*, there are the less common *beneath* (formal) and *underneath*

- *close to* and *near to* can have comparisons:

e.g. Please move this desk *close(r) to* the wall.
Please move this desk *near(er) (to)* the wall.

- *between* (two objects, groups of objects) . *among* / *amid* / *amidst*

- esp. in BrE, *about* is like *around*: e.g. She put her arms *about* him.

c) Passage

- the notion of passage combines position and motion, disregarding destination
e.g. I love walking *through woods* in spring.
- other prep. used for passage: *by, over, under, across, past*

Compare:

on the grass v. *in the grass*
across the grass v. *through the grass*

Be careful as you drive *round corners*.
The children were playing *around the park*.

d) Metaphorical extension with spatial prepositions

- with many spatial prepositions, metaphor enables similar but abstract relations to be expressed

e.g. *in the room* : *in this book, in some difficulty*
out of the bottle : *out of danger, out of the competition*
beneath the branches : *beneath contempt*
under the floorboards : *under suspicion*
up the hill : *up the social scale*
downhill : *down market*
beyond the post office : *beyond endurance*
over the mountain : (she's getting) *over her illness*
from Boston to Bangor : *from generation to generation*
between the trees : *between ourselves*
through the tunnel : *through the ordeal*

II. TIME

a) Time position

- the question is *When?* – *at, on, in*

- 'at' - points of time: e.g. The film begins *at 7.30*.

What are you doing *at the weekend?*

I saw her *at Christmas*.

... *at that time / at noon / at midnight*

- 'in' - time is regarded as a period

e.g. *In the evening*, I listened to music.

Where did he live *in his childhood?*

I saw her *in March / in 1998*.

- 'on' - in expressions referring to days:

e.g. We can come *on Monday / on Tuesday afternoon*.

I was born *on July 12th*.

Note: I cannot sleep *at night*. v. We heard her coughing several times *in the night*.

b) Time duration

- the question is *How long?* - *for*
e.g. We stayed in a rented cottage *for the summer*.
- *throughout* and *all through* – express **emphasis on the duration**
e.g. Try to stay alert *throughout the entire ceremony*.
- *during* indicates a stretch of time within which a more specific duration can be indicated:
e.g. *During the summer*, we stayed in a rented cottage *for a month*.
- *over* – e.g. *stay overnight, over the weekend, over the Christmas period*
- *from ... to...* - reference to the beginning and ending
e.g. The office will be open *from Monday to Friday*. (also: *between Monday and Friday*)
- duration specifying only a starting point (or only a terminal point) is expressed by phrases with: *by, before, from, after, since, till, until, up to*
e.g. She will be here *by Friday night*.
She will not be here *before Friday night*.
I worked *from 8 o'clock (onwards)*.
He did not set out *till / until Monday afternoon*.
You can stay here *till / until / up to lunch time*.

Note: '*prior to*' and '*in advance of*' can replace '*before*' in formal style

III. CAUSE and PURPOSE

- 'cause, reason, motive' - *because of, on account of, for, out of, etc.*
e.g. He lost his job *because of his laziness*.
She was fined *for dangerous driving*.
The plane crashed *through some navigational error*.
- the notion of 'motive' shades into 'purpose, goal and target' - for all of these prepositions *for* is common:
e.g. They are appealing *for donations*.
We had better set out *for home*.
She is applying *for a better job*.
He built a play-pen *for the little girl*.
- 'at' - the goal or target is usually viewed with hostility:
e.g. He shouted *at* them. (=he was angry) v. He shouted *to* them. (=called)
but in other cases it is quite neutral: e.g. She *smiled at* the child.
She *laughed at* the idea.

Note: X *lends* st to Y v. Y *borrow*s st *from* X

'as' = in the role of: e.g. *As a subscriber*, I ought to have been consulted.

IV. From MEANS to STIMULUS (means, instrument, agency, stimulus)

- the question is *How?* – *by* (means), *with* (instrument)
e.g. I go to work *by car*.
Please send this to the London office *by telex*.
She won the match *with her fast service*.
He managed to open the door *without a key*.
- the agent is expressed by the preposition *by*:
e.g. This picture was painted *by Degas*.
I was bitten *by a neighbour's dog*.
- 'stimulus' and 'reaction' are chiefly expressed by *at*, but also others, e.g. *about, in, of, to*
e.g. I am surprised *at her attitude*.
I was pleased *about the choice of the date*.
Are you interested *in astronomy*?
I think he is jealous *of her*.
To me, her proposal is broadly acceptable.
- with means of transport, '*on*' + *article* can be used instead of '*by*' + *zero*:
e.g. I often go to work *on the 8.15 train*.

V. ACCOMPANIMENT

- *with* = in the company of v. *without*

e.g. I hope you will come to dinner *with your husband*.
For once, Jill went *without her husband*.
What will you drink *with your meal*?
I cannot concentrate *without silence*.
- the accompaniment may become a circumstance and the phrase will then connote 'manner':
e.g. He entered the room *with a worried look*.
- 'manner' is also expressed with *(un)like*:
e.g. Fred, *(un)like his brother*, is trusted by few.

VI. CONCESSION and other relations

- 'concession' - is expressed by prepositions: *in spite of, despite, notwithstanding* (fml), and informal *for all, with all*:
e.g. The article is being published *in spite of her disapproval*. / *for all her disapproval*.
- 'exception' - the chief prepositions are: *except (for), excepting, with the exception of, excluding, apart from, aside from, but*
e.g. *Except for the weather*, our stay in Scotland was enjoyable.
Everyone seemed tired *but me*.

- 'addition' - is expressed by: *besides, as well as, in addition to*
e.g. The orchestra was disappointing *as well as the soloist*.
- 'negative condition' - is expressed by: *but for*
e.g. *But for me*, the case would have been lost. (i.e. If it hadn't been for me)
- 'respect' - is expressed by: *as for, as to, about, on the matter of, concerning, as regards, with regard to, with respect to*
e.g. Now, *about your application*, are you sure you would like a job of this kind?
- *as for* is often used to indicate a change of topic:
e.g. The coat is splendid but *as for the hat* I don't think it suits you.

Modification

- both prepositions and prepositional adverbs can be modified in terms of 'measure' and 'degree' by being accompanied by intensifiers:

e.g. She arrived *shortly after ten*.
She arrived at ten or *shortly after*.
He expected to be *well ahead of Compton* but he finished in fact *just behind*.

The following section (page 7-12) is a summary of the most common prepositions and prepositional phrases.

SUMMARY OF THE MOST COMMON PREPOSITIONS

TIME

AT (time)

- at 5 o'clock, at 11.30
- at midnight, at lunchtime, at night, at noon, at the weekend
- at sunset
- at Christmas, at Easter
- at the moment, at present, at the same time

ON (time)

- on Friday, on Monday morning,
- on Christmas Day
- on my birthday
- on March 14th 1990

IN (time)

- in October, in 1980, in the 1970s
- in the 18th century, in the Middle Ages
- in the past, in (the) future, in winter
- in four weeks (in four weeks' time)

Note:

- **on time** = punctual, not late, e.g. The 11.45 train left *on time*. (at 11.45)
the opposite of **on time** is **late**, e.g. Be *on time*. Don't be *late*.
- **in time** (for something / to do something) = soon enough
e.g. Will you be home *in time* for dinner?
I want to get home *in time* to see the football match on television.
the opposite of **in time** is **too late**, e.g. I got home *too late* to see the football match.
- **at the end of** st = at the time when st ends
e.g. at the end of the month, the film, January, the concert, the course
the opposite of **at the end** is **at the beginning**
- **in the end** = finally; we say what the final result of a situation was
e.g. We had a lot of problems with our car. *In the end* we sold it and bought another one.
the opposite of **in the end** is **at first**, e.g. At first I didn't like her, but in the end we became good friends

PLACE

IN (place)

- in the room, in the building, in the garden
- in your hand, in your mouth, in a box
- in Italy, in a small village
- in the mountains, in the sea, in the river
- in a line, in a row, in a queue, in a street
- in a photograph, in a picture, in a mirror
- in the sky, in the world
- in the sea (We were swimming in the sea)
- in a newspaper, in a magazine, in a letter
- in the basement
- in the corner (in a room)
- in the front / back of the car
- in bed, in hospital, in prison
- in a car, taxi

AT (place)

- at the bus stop, at the door, at the window
- at the traffic lights, at the church,
- at the end of the street, at reception (hotel)
- at the back of a building
- at the front, at the cinema,
- at the corner / on the corner (outside)
- at school, at home, at work, at university, at college
- at sea (=on a voyage) e.g. We were at sea for 30 days.
- at a party, at a meeting, at a concert, at a football match
- at the hairdresser's, at the doctor's
- at Judy's (her place)
- at the station, at the airport
- at the Odeon (cinema), at the Royal Festival Hall

ON (place)

- on the ceiling, on the door, the wall,
- on the grass, on your nose, on your shirt
- on the notice board
- on an island
- on the left
- on the second floor
- on a farm, on a map, on the menu, on a list
- on the river Thames, on the south coast of England
- on the way to London
- on the front / back of the letter/ envelope/ piece of paper
- on a bus, a train, plane, ship
- on a bicycle, on a motorcycle, on a horse
- (you will find the article) on page seven (of a newspaper)

Compare:

I was sitting *in the back of the car*. v. The garden is *at the back of the house*.

Let's sit *at the front (of the cinema)*. v. Let's sit *in the front row*.

There is some water *in the bottle*. v. There is a label *on the bottle*.

Tom's parents live *in Nottingham*. v. Does this train stop *at Nottingham?* (=at N. station)

I was *at Jane's house* last night. v. The rooms *in Jane's house* are very small.

There were a lot of people *in the shop*. v. Turn left *at the shop*.

There is somebody *at the door*. v. Can you read the sign *on the door?*

OTHER PREPOSITIONS / OTHER USES

TO

- **go** to America, to bed, to the bank, to a party, to a concert
- return to Italy
- go to a party x we will meet at the party
- drive to the airport
- a journey to..., a trip to..., **welcome to ...**
- **get to** work, the theatre, London
- **I've been to** London, to a football match
- **get to** a place x **arrive in / at**

Compare:

- **get into the car** v. **get out of the car**
- **get on the bus** v. **get off the bus, train, plane**

ON

- on holiday, on business, on a trip, on a tour, on a cruise
- on television, on the radio, on the phone
- on a diet
- on strike
- on fire

IN

- in the rain, in the sun, in the dark, in the shade, in bad weather
- in ink, in pencil
- in words, in figures, in block letters
- in cash x by cheque, by credit card
- in my opinion

AT

- at the age of 17
- at a speed of..., at a temperature of..., at 120 miles an hour

BY

- by post, by hand
- by cheque
- by mistake, by accident, by chance
- by road, rail, air, sea, underground
- by train, plane, boat, ship, bicycle
- a play by Shakespeare
- by 20% - her salary has increased by 20%

Compare:

- **by car** v. **in my car, in a taxi**
- **by train** v. **on the train**

NOUNS + PREPOSITIONS

- a cheque for £ 100
- a reason for the delay
- an advantage of living alone
- a cause of the explosion
- a photo of her family
- an increase in the number of accidents / a decrease in / a rise in / a fall in
- damage to the car
- an invitation to a party
- a solution to a problem
- a key to the door
- an answer to a question / a reply to a question
- an attitude to a job (also: *towards*)
- a relationship with parents
- differences between two brothers

ADJECTIVES + PREPOSITIONS

- nice, kind, good, generous, stupid of somebody to do something
- be nice, kind, good, generous to somebody
- angry / annoyed / furious about something + with somebody for doing something
- excited, worried, upset, nervous, happy about
- delighted, pleased, satisfied, disappointed with
- surprised, shocked, amazed, astonished at / by something
- impressed with / by somebody, something
- fed up / bored with something

- sorry about something – I am sorry about the noise last night.
- sorry for doing something – I am sorry for shouting at you.
- sorry – I am sorry I shouted at you
- feel sorry / be sorry for somebody – I feel sorry for George. He has a lot of problems.

- afraid / frightened / terrified of

- fond / proud / ashamed / jealous / envious of his wife, friends
- suspicious / critical / tolerant of
- aware / conscious of
- capable / incapable of passing the exam
- full of mistakes / short of money
- typical of this job
- tired of waiting
- certain / sure of / about
- good, bad, excellent, brilliant, hopeless at
- married / engaged to
- similar to
- different from
- interested in
- keen on
- dependent on
- independent of
- crowded with
- famous for
- responsible for

VERBS + PREPOSITIONS

- look, have a look, stare, glance at
- laugh / smile at
- aim / point at something
- shoot / fire (a gun) at
- talk / speak to (with is also possible)
- listen to
- write a letter to
- phone somebody (no preposition)
- invite st to a party
- shout at (angry) v. shout to (call to sb)
- throw st at sb, st in order to hit it / them – He threw an egg at the minister
- throw st to sb (to catch) it – He threw the keys to me from the window.
- explain st to sb
- apologise to sb for doing st
- thank for
- ask for st (to be given) v. ask about st (I want to know)

- talk about / tell sb about
- discuss something (no preposition)
- do st about st (a problem)
- care about st / sb – think that it is important
- care for – a) like st - Would you care for a cup of coffee?
b) look after – She cares for her younger sister.
- take care of
- wait for
- search a person, place, a bag for st

- leave for another place
compare: She *left home*. V. She *left (work) for home*.
- look for = search for
- look after = take care of

- dream about – while asleep
- dream of – to imagine st
- remind sb about a meeting (not to forget)
- remind sb of st (cause somebody to remember)
- complain about (you are not satisfied)
- complain of (say you have a pain)

- accuse / suspect sb of st
- approve of
- die of (an illness)
- pay for st v. pay a bill, a fine, a tax, rent
- thank / forgive for
- blame sb for
- suffer from (an illness)
- protect st / sb from / against
- depend on / rely on
- live on (money)
- congratulate on
- believe in
- specialize in
- succeed in
- break into (a house to steal st)
- crash/ bump / run into
- divide / split st into
- translate a book from one language into another
- collide with
- fill st with
- provide / supply sb with
- prefer st to st
- concentrate on
- insist on
- spend money on