

# A Comparative Survey of the Preposition and Prepositional Phrase

J. J. Duggan

## INTRODUCTION

Japanese students of English, though having studied English grammar for six or more years, still tend to produce awkward or non-grammatical sentences, whether written or verbally presented. Though awkward sentences or those sentences with minor grammatical flaws tend to remain intelligible, and therefore communicative, there are times when the incorrect usage of even a minor article can greatly affect the meaning the user is trying to get across. Very often, such errors center on preposition and prepositional phrase usage.

As a first step towards finding a pedagogical solution to prepositional and prepositional phrase usage error, we must first try to understand what *are* prepositions and prepositional phrases.

This paper will analyze the form and function of the grammatical constructions "preposition" and "prepositional phrase." This analysis will be based on the comparative views of eight "English grammar" (reference) texts. Three evidently adhere to the school of Traditional thought:

- 1) *Harbrace College Handbook*, 8th Ed., Hodges & Whitten, (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977). This was this author's

grammar reference text in college freshman English. Hereafter referred to as "Handbook."

- 2) *The Little English Handbook*, 2nd Ed., J. Corbett, (Wiley & Sons, 1977). This was another reference handbook. Hereafter referred to as "Little."
- 3) *A New College English Grammar*, K. Ishibashi, (Seibido, 1956). This was a grammar text for Japanese college students. Selected for its traditional Japanese educational viewpoint. Hereafter referred to as "New."

Four are from what might be termed "Neo-traditional":

- 4) *Essentials of English Grammar*, O. Jespersen<sup>1)</sup> (Allen & Unwin, 1933). "A one-volume grammar embodying the principles explained in *The Philosophy of Grammar* and partly carried out in the seven volumes of my *Modern English Grammar*."<sup>2)</sup> Hereafter referred to as "Essentials."
- 5) *A University Grammar of English*, R. Quirk & S. Greenbaum, (Longman, 1973). A shorter version of *A Grammar of Contemporary English* (Longman, 1972), regarded by many as "the" English grammar reference. Hereafter referred to as "University."
- 6) *Current English Grammar*, S. Chalker, (Macmillan, 1984). "I have been particularly influenced by the work of Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartivik..."<sup>3)</sup> Hereafter referred to as "Current."
- 7) *Ways to Grammar*, J. Shepherd, R. Rossner, and J. Taylor, (Macmillan, 1984). "It would have been hard to think of writing a

---

1) Danish linguist, 1860-1943. Sometimes referred to as the 'Father of Modern English Grammar.'

2) Otto Jespersen, *Essentials of English Grammar*(London: George Allen & Unwin, 1933), p. 5.

3) Sylvia Chalker, *Current English Grammar*(London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 10.

A Comparative Survey of the Preposition and Prepositional Phrase

book like this without the inspiration (and information) offered by R. Quirk, S. Greenbaum, G. Leech, and J. Svartvik in *A Grammar of Contemporary English* (Longman, 1972)."<sup>4)</sup> Hereafter referred to as "Ways."

The eighth text is one that is evidently Generative-Transformational in presentation:

- 8) *The Grammar Book*, M. Celce-Murcia & D. Larsen-Freeman, (Newbury House, 1983). A recent and popular reference text. Hereafter referred to as "Grammar."

Since the selected grammar texts fall into either the traditional (and Neo-traditional) or Generative-Transformational schools, the aforementioned grammatical constructions will be presented from these two (three?) general viewpoints<sup>5)</sup>, but even these general viewpoints will have their variations. Jespersen was an "enlightened" traditionalist, for example. His treatment of English grammar was far more elastic than the traditional methods. In fact, "the many structural linguists who condemned all traditional grammar... (and) ... who lumped together all of traditional grammar under one label were unaware of such important scholarly traditionalists as ... Otto Jespersen ... and others, whose work

---

4) John Shepherd, Richard Rossner, and James Taylor, *Ways to Grammar* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. iii. Refers to *A Grammar of Contemporary English* (Longman, 1972).

5) In my survey of various grammar(reference) texts, I noted the absence of any structural grammar-oriented texts, and an overabundance of traditional-oriented texts. This indicates what a strong hold traditional grammar has on the presentation and teaching of English grammar, not only in Japan, but in the English-speaking countries where these texts were published, as well.

was far from being dogmatic, shallow, or subjective.”<sup>6)</sup>

*Ways* tells us that, “It must be remembered that different people see grammar in different ways. There is no single version of English grammar.”<sup>7)</sup> So, in this way, there is no single explanation for a concept or construction of grammar. “There are many different ways of interpreting and organizing the data (to any grammatical problem). Of course, some explanations are more satisfactory than others, but not even word classes are clear-cut or self-evident, while what is grammatically possible and what is grammatically unacceptable often converge in an uncertain grey area.”<sup>8)</sup>

## DEFINITION

With the preceding paragraph’s presentation of grammatical ambiguity in mind, perhaps our first step should be to arrive at a clear definition of a preposition. I would like to refer to Herndon<sup>9)</sup> first to get Herndon’s definitions of a preposition and prepositional phrase from the three schools of thought — Traditional, Structural, and Generative-Transformational.

Herndon says that traditionally, “A *preposition* is a word used to show a relationship between a noun or pronoun and some other word or sentence.”<sup>10)</sup> Notice that “preposition” is a “name” for a word, as are “noun” and “pronoun.” Herndon continues, “Prepositions are words such as

---

6) Lyda E. LaPalombara, *An Introduction to Grammar*(Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop, 1976), p. 23.

7) Shepherd et al., p. iv.

8) Chalker, p. 7.

9) Jeanne H. Herndon, *A Survey of Modern Grammars*, 2nd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976).

10) *Ibid.*, p. 61.

## A Comparative Survey of the Preposition and Prepositional Phrase

*above, by, for, in, to, upon, and within.* There are also two-word prepositions such as *across from* and *out of*, and even three-word prepositions such as *on top of*. The combination of preposition plus the noun or pronoun and any modifiers the noun or pronoun may have is called a *prepositional phrase*. The noun or pronoun in the phrase is referred to as the object of the preposition.”<sup>11)</sup>

From the structural viewpoint, Herndon states that, “Prepositions introduce modifying or qualifying phrases set apart by intonation pattern and the presence of the preposition form.”<sup>12)</sup> She lists prepositions as one kind of *function* word. “These (function) words have been defined as those having little or no lexical meaning. They are used in combination with form class words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) in larger structures (such as the prepositional phrase). The relationship of function words to form class words is often likened to that of mortar and bricks.”<sup>13)</sup>

Unfortunately, Herndon doesn't define a preposition from the Generative-Transformational view. Perhaps *Grammar* can present us with more information concerning a Generative-Transformational definition in our next section: seeing how our other texts define “preposition” and “prepositional phrase.”

*Handbook* defines the *preposition* as “a part of speech (often called a function word) that is used to show the relation of a noun or noun equivalent (the object of the preposition) to some other word in the sentence.”<sup>14)</sup>

---

11) Ibid.

12) Ibid., p. 106.

13) Ibid., p. 105.

14) John C. Hodges and Mary E. Whitten, *Harbrace College Handbook*, 8th ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), p. 442.

The victim *lay in the rubble*. (The preposition *in* shows the relationship of its object *rubble* to the verb *lay*).

“A preposition, a function word, always has an object, which is usually a noun or a pronoun; the preposition with its object (and any modifiers) is called a *prepositional phrase*.”<sup>15)</sup>

The elected official expressed *with great regret* his purchase of *unlisted shares*.

*Little* defines the *preposition* as one kind of function word (or particle). “Function words are those ‘little words’ in the language that have very little vocabulary meaning, but perform such vital functions as connecting or relating other words in the sentence.”<sup>16)</sup> Prepositions are for “connecting or relating their objects to some other word in the sentence.”<sup>17)</sup> A *prepositional phrase* is one kind of modifier. “A modifier is a word, phrase, or clause that limits, specifies, qualifies, or describes another word.”<sup>18)</sup>

the missile *with the nuclear warhead* (prepositional phrase modifying *missile*).

In *New*, in a rough translation from Japanese, *prepositions* are defined as function words that usually occur preceding nouns or pronouns (objects of preposition), and together they form the *prepositional phrase*.

---

15) Ibid., p. 13.

16) Edward P. J. Corbett, *The Little English Handbook*, 2nd ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1977), p. 202.

17) Ibid.

18) Ibid., p. 207.

## A Comparative Survey of the Preposition and Prepositional Phrase

The examples of the prepositions given are similar to those in the preceding texts.

*Essentials* defines *prepositions* as one kind of particle (along with adverbs, co-ordinating conjunctions, and subordinating conjunctions) that “indicate relations of various kinds.”<sup>19)</sup> The *prepositional phrase* is defined merely as a “prepositional combination” such as:

*preposition* + (*noun*), or  
*preposition* + *verb* + *object*.

*University* says, “In the most general terms, a *preposition* expresses a relation between two entities, one being that represented by the prepositional complement. A *prepositional phrase* consists of a preposition followed by a prepositional complement, which is characteristically a noun phrase or a wh-clause or V-ing clause.”<sup>20)</sup>

Preposition	Prepositional Complement
<i>on</i>	<i>the battleship</i> (noun phrase)
<i>from</i>	<i>what he denied</i> (wh-clause)
<i>by</i>	<i>signing a tax bill</i> (V-ing clause)

*Current* states that, “*Prepositions* are a minor word class. They serve to connect major words (usually nouns) to other parts of the sentence.”<sup>21)</sup> About prepositional phrases, it tells us that, “*Prepositions* can be followed by various word classes to form *prepositional phrases* — e.g. nouns (*at night, in the shop*), pronouns (*for us, to me*), wh-clause (I can’t live *on what they pay me*, They argued *about how to do it*), -ing clauses (*by*

---

19) Jespersen, p. 69.

20) Randolph Quirk and Sidney Greenbaum, *A University Grammar of English* (Harlow, England: Longman, 1973), p. 143.

21) Chalker, p. 214.

*working hard*), and unusually, by adverbs (*before now*) and adjectives (*in short*).<sup>22)</sup>

Ways states, “*Prepositions* are used to refer to a relationship between persons, things, etc. and other persons, things, places, times, etc.”<sup>23)</sup> It gives no definition for a *prepositional phrase*, but does present numerous examples of them that would hold true with previous definitions.

In its section on prepositions, *Grammar* doesn’t define “preposition.” It merely uses the term. It says earlier (in the Introduction) that, “We assume that you know the basic parts of speech (noun, verb, adjective, adverb, pronoun, *preposition*, article, and auxiliary verb).”<sup>24)</sup> It also states here that, “The textbook will follow a transformational framework where useful, but will switch to a more traditional expository format or to some other framework when necessary so that essential topics can be covered.”<sup>25)</sup> In keeping with this, when we find a definition for “preposition,” it requires “traditional” elements: “In case grammar, subject and object are surface slots or positions and any noun that is not functioning as the surface subject or object of the verb must be preceded by a *preposition*. The preposition in turn, gives clues as to the semantic function of the noun it precedes.”<sup>26)</sup> Under Generative-Transformational grammar, “A *prepositional phrase* is expanded into a preposition P and a noun phrase NP.”<sup>27)</sup> *Prepositional phrases* are considered to be one kind of adverbial.

In summary, the definitions of “preposition” and “prepositional phrase”

---

22) Ibid., p. 217.

23) Shepherd et al., p. 258.

24) Marianne Celce-Murcia and Diane Larsen-Freeman, *The Grammar Book* (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1983), p. 7.

25) Ibid.

26) Ibid.

27) Ibid., p. 13.



## A Comparative Survey of the Preposition and Prepositional Phrase

found in all the texts are essentially similar, “in the most general terms” as *University* puts it. Even *Grammar* must refer to these “traditional” definitions in order to clarify what “preposition” means. Based on this, my *general* definition would be, for a *preposition*: A function word/words (or particle) that expresses a relationship between persons, things, etc. and other persons, things, places, times, actions, etc. (nouns, pronouns, wh-clauses, V-ing clauses, and sometimes adverbs and adjectives). My *general* definition for a *prepositional phrase* is: A phrase that limits, specifies, qualifies, or describes (an)other word(s), and consists of a preposition followed by a prepositional complement, which is characteristically a noun (or pronoun) phrase, wh-clause, or V-ing clause.

### FORM & FUNCTION

First, let us illustrate an example of form and function with a simple sentence:

*Fans in wire cages shouldn't cause violence.*

In form, *fans*, *wire*, *cages*, and *violence* are nouns. In function, three of them also have typically noun-like functions. *Fans* functions as the subject of the sentence, *violence* functions as the object, and *cage* fills a typically noun-like position after a preposition. But with *wire* there is a mismatch between its noun form (contrast adjective *wiry*) and its descriptive function before the noun, which is more like the role of an adjective. So we see that the same class of words (e.g. nouns) may have more than one function, and that the same function (e.g. adjectival) may be carried out by more than one word class. Similar distinctions between form and function can be made at other levels. For example, *in wire cages* is a *prepositional phrase* in form. Its function here is adjectival (post-modifying *fans*). But elsewhere it could be an adverbial of

place:

Soccer fans should be locked up *in wire cages*.

## FORM

Now, let us concentrate on the form of prepositions and prepositional phrases. *Current* states that “prepositions are not distinguished from other word classes by any characteristic form...”<sup>28)</sup>

This seems to be true, as words that sometimes function as prepositions, at other times function as adverbs or other word classes (as we shall see in the section on prepositional function). Prepositions seem to be a *function*, and not a *form*. So, as to the form of prepositions, let's consider the form of those words when they function as prepositions.

The texts generally agree on the forms of prepositions, though they give different names to these.

*University* divides prepositions into two groups — *simple* and *complex*. “Most of the common English prepositions, such as *at*, *in* and *for*, are *simple*, i.e. consist of one word. Other prepositions, consisting of more than one word, are called *complex*.”<sup>29)</sup> Most complex prepositions fall into one of the following categories:

- 1) Adverb or Prep. + Prep.: *together with*, *as for*, *away from*, *out of*, *up to*, etc.
- 2) Verb/Adjective/Conjunction/etc. + Prep.: *owing to*, *due to*, *because of*, etc.
- 3) Prep. + Noun + Prep.: *by means of*, *in comparison with*, *in back*

---

28) Chalker, p. 214.

29) Quirk and Greenbaum, pp. 145-46.

## A Comparative Survey of the Preposition and Prepositional Phrase

*of*, etc.

*Current* also divides their prepositions according to form in this manner. They further add, "A number of two- and three-word phrases behave like simple prepositions. They are marginally 'open-class,' because new combinations could perhaps be formed. The term 'complex preposition' is given to such phrases (e.g. *in spite of*). This must be distinguished from the term 'prepositional phrase' which means a preposition + complement, usually a noun phrase—e.g. *in the garden*."<sup>30)</sup>

*College* gives different names. "Simple" prepositions are sometimes referred to as "original" prepositions, and complex prepositions are referred to as "phrasal" or "group" prepositions.

*Grammar*, while not naming forms, explains the rules for generating such prepositional forms as simple prepositions and "double" prepositions<sup>31)</sup> (e.g. *out of*, *off of*, *away from*): "Another structural variation comes from the fact that several common and frequent prepositions require or permit a second supporting preposition in contexts involving cause or direction. The double prepositions can be accounted for if we allow our basic rule for prepositional phrases to be expanded as follows to describe this additional structural possibility PP— P PP."<sup>32)</sup> It also accounts for preposition deletion (PP—  $\phi$ ), as well as prepositions that "co-occur": "Certain prepositions should be taught together as nonadjacent co-occurring constituents since they so often both occur in the same sentence (spoken and written discourse). We are thinking particularly in terms of the following four sets:

---

30) Chalker, p. 214.

31) Referred to as a 2-word 'complex' preposition by *University* and *Current*, and a 'phrasal' or 'group' preposition by *College*. No mention was made of a 3-word preposition by *Grammar*.

32) Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, p. 252.

- 1) *from ... to* (distance range, time range, or range of degree)
- 2) *out of ... until/till* (time range only)
- 3) *out of ... into* (change of enclosure or state)
- 4) *off (of) ... on (to)* (change of location with verbs like *take* and *put*).<sup>33)</sup>

*Current* and *University* both also account for *postposed prepositions*. *University* states: “Normally a preposition must be followed by its complement; but there are some circumstances in which this does not happen, either because the complement has to take first position in the clause, or because it is absent.”<sup>34)</sup>

When we think of the name preposition, our learning (based on the traditions of Latin-based grammar) leads us to believe that prepositions must always precede their complement (or object). This kind of thinking only leads to some very unnatural English:

*\*For what are you looking?*

*\*From where do you come?*

In the following cases, prepositions normally come at the end of their clause:<sup>35)</sup>

A) wh-clauses and questions:

*Where* are you *from*?

*What* I'm looking *for* is an interesting job.

*What* a lot of things you complain *about*.

*What* is your new job *like*?

---

33) Ibid., p. 253.

34) Quirk and Greenbaum, p. 144.

35) Chalker, p. 217.

## A Comparative Survey of the Preposition and Prepositional Phrase

### B) Relative clause:

The girl he's in love *with* is only seventeen.

The girl *that/who(m)* he's in love *with* is ... (*The girl with whom he's in love* is formal).

### C) Passive of prepositional verbs etc.:

*The children* were looked *after* by their aunt.

### D) Infinitive complementation:

There's *nobody* to talk *to*.

You're nice to be *with*.

As to the general form of the prepositional phrase, this has already been given in the definition of the prepositional phrase earlier, but let us present it here in more detail.

*Prepositions* can be followed by various word classes to form *prepositional phrases*:

- 1) nouns (*at sea, on the ship*). The typical prepositional phrase consists of a *preposition* + *noun*.
- 2) pronouns (*for me, to him*). Pronouns after a preposition must be in objective case in standard English (*between you and me*).
- 3) Wh-clauses (I reflected *on what they said*. They fought *with sticks and stones*.)
- 4) -ing clauses (*by staying awake*)
- 5) unusually, by adverbs (*before now*) and adjectives (*in short*)
- 6) those prepositions on the borderline with conjunctions (*but, except, than, as well as*) that can be followed by infinitives:  
He did nothing *but/except smile*.  
It would be better to attack *than (to) retreat*.
- 7) a verbal noun (gerund) which is the only part of a verb that can follow a preposition:  
He did it *without asking*.

*Instead of acting*, they waited.

Prepositions are not followed by *that-clauses*. (An apparent exception is (*in that* + *clause*), but *in that* seems to be functioning as a complex conjunction, meaning “for the following reason”:

She has a problem, *in that she's deaf*.

## FUNCTION

The function of prepositions and prepositional phrases was perhaps best presented in *Current*: “Prepositional phrases are not grammatically parallel to noun phrases or verb phrases. Long noun phrases or verb phrases function as simple nouns or verbs do, but prepositions are a minor part of speech and have to be attached to something else. A prepositional phrase therefore has quite different functions from a simple preposition.”<sup>36)</sup>

The syntactic functions of prepositional phrases as listed in *Current*, *University* and other texts were essentially similar, though *Current* and *University* presented it best. In summary, *prepositional phrases* can function as:

- 1) adjectival (usually post-modifying in a noun phrase):  
a bird *with black feathers*  
tourists *from Japan*
- 2) adverbial:  
place: I dislike being *in a courtroom*.  
time: I'll see you *at noon*.

---

36) Ibid., p. 218.

## A Comparative Survey of the Preposition and Prepositional Phrase

other: She was trampled *by the crowd*.

- 3) complement to a verb:

this testimony consists *of lies*.

- 4) complement to an adjective:

aware *of the damage*

interested *in soccer*<sup>37)</sup>

- 5) for + NP + *to*-infinitive (*for* plus a noun phrase can give a logical subject to a *to*-infinitive):

*For him to lie* was foolish.

I have arranged *for my secretary to receive* the funds.

- 6) object of another preposition:

I'll be there *for over ten years*.

As for *prepositions*, the texts in our survey classify them in terms of their semantic functions (meaning/usage), as opposed to the classification of *prepositional phrases* by their syntactic functions.

In the following tables I will not attempt to list all the various prepositions and their various usages. These can be found in any good dictionary or grammar reference (some of which are surveyed in this paper). Rather, I wish to give examples of usages and how the surveyed texts present these.

*Prepositions* can be divided into three major groups by meaning:<sup>38)</sup>

- 1) Prepositions of position and direction:

---

37) An alternative analysis of 3 and 4 could be that the verb or adjective plus preposition forms a phrase, and what follows is the 'object' of the preposition, and not that the prepositional phrase is a complement to the verb or adjective. In any case, the fact is that a prepositional phrase can follow many verbs and adjectives.

38) Shepherd et al., p. 259.

above	down	out (of)
across	from	outside
along	in	over
among	in front of	past
away from	into	through
below	near	towards
between	on	up

2) Prepositions of time:

after	during	on
at	for	since
before	from	to

3) Prepositions, other, not of place or time:

about	for	on
by	like	with
except	of	without

From this list, though incomplete, one can realize the great number of prepositions that exist, the most common being of place and of time.

While, of course, "A major use of prepositions is to relate things or people in various ways in place and time,"<sup>39)</sup> as *Current* states, this is not the limit of meaning. *Current* continues, "Many common prepositions apply to both place and time, with very similar meanings."<sup>40)</sup>

1) *at* — Points

place: *at* home, *at* Tom's, *at* the North Pole

time: *at* one o'clock, *at* night, *at* a glance

2) *on* — Lines, surfaces, areas (place); time similarly seen as having surface but not interior:

---

39) Chalker, p. 219.

40) Ibid.



## A Comparative Survey of the Preposition and Prepositional Phrase

place: *on* the floor, *on* the cover, *on* an island

time: *on* Sunday, *on* Christmas Day, *on* time (exactly)

- 3) *in* — 3-dimensional enclosing spaces; time also seen as having interior:

place: *in* the cupboard, *in* heaven, *in* this book

time: *in* April, I'll be back *in* ten minutes.

- 4) *to*—Goal:

place: We're going *to* Scotland.

time: The exhibition is open *to* Saturday.<sup>41)</sup>

Some of these place/time prepositions carry over much of their meaning into figurative uses, though some have other meanings as well.

There are also some common prepositions (e.g. *with*, *of*) that do not have place or time meanings.

*Grammar* presents much the same tables as *Current*. Their tables consist of twenty selected common prepositions (*at*, *about*, *above*, *against*, *around*, *before*, *below*, *between*, *by*, *for*, *from*, *in*, *of*, *on*, *over*, *through*, *to*, *toward(s)*, *under*, and *with*) which exhibit space, time, degree, and other usages.<sup>42)</sup>

*at* = a specific point:

space: Meet me *at* 224 Park Avenue.

time: Be there *at* 1 p.m.

degree: Water boils *at* 100 degrees C.

This reaffirms what *Current* stated earlier — that many prepositions have more than one meaning — be it place, time, degree, idiomatic, or other. A useful list *Grammar* does present is in semantic case functions

---

41) For an extensive listing, I refer you to pp. 220–23 in *Current*.

42) Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, pp. 257–58.

(i.e. relationships among people and/or objects, not relations dealing with space, time, degree, or manner, etc.).<sup>43)</sup>

*by* (agentive): It was done *by John*.

*by* (means): We went there *by bus*.

*for* (benefactive): I bought the gift *for Mary*.

*for* (proxy): He manages the store *for Mr. Smith*.

*from* (ablative, source): Joe bought the car *from Bill*.

*of* (eliciting): He asked a favor *of us*.

*of* (separation): He robbed us *of our jewelry*.

*to* (dative): I gave the book *to John*.

*to* (direction, goal): We drove *to Boston*.

*with* (instrument): He broke the window *with a rock*.

*with* (comitative): I went to town *with Jack*.

*with* (joining): We presented him *with a gift*.

*University* presents the same prepositional meanings, but in a different manner. It doesn't present meaning as a variable of each preposition (as do *Current*, *Ways*, and *Grammar*), but by what prepositions fall into each class of meaning. The classes and the prepositions which occur in these meanings are:

1) place:

dimension: *at, on, in*, etc.

positive position and direction: *at, to*, etc.

negative position and direction: *away from, off*, etc.

relative position: *by, over, under*, etc.

relative destination: *by, over, under*, etc.

---

43) Ibid., p. 255.

## A Comparative Survey of the Preposition and Prepositional Phrase

passage: *by, over, under*, etc.

passage: *across, through, past*

direction: *up, down, along*, etc.

orientation: *beyond, over, past*, etc.

resultative meaning

pervasive meaning: *all over, throughout*, etc.

metaphorical or abstract use of place prepositions

### 2) time:

time when: *at, on, in*

duration: *for*, etc.

*before, after, since*, and *until/till*

*between, by* and *up to*

### 3) prepositional phrase chiefly as adjunct:

(cause — purpose):

cause, reason, motive: *because of*, etc.

etc.<sup>44)</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The lists and tables in the preceding section on prepositional function were meant to fill two roles with respect to you, the reader. One, to add to an overall comparative understanding of the *preposition* and *prepositional phrase*; and two, to show from where student error and confusion can arise, with respect to prepositions and prepositional phrases. Not only from the number of prepositions (multiplied by their uses in prepositional phrases), but also the varying forms, functions & meanings; dual or multiple applications (to place *and* time); as well as figurative uses.

This is not to say that *prepositions* and *prepositional phrases* are nebu-

---

44) For a complete listing, I refer you to pp. 146–165 in *University*.

lous and undefinable items. On the contrary, though the different texts in our survey may give different names to, present differently, and explain differently the various aspects of grammar in general, and *prepositions* and *prepositional phrases* in particular, it's still the same thing. They are more already existing functions of the language, than forms. The grammar explains the language that exists, and not vice-versa. For this reason, we expect and find agreement on the major points of definition, function, form, and meaning in our comparative survey of the *preposition* and *prepositional phrase*.

## REFERENCES

- Celce-Murcia, Marianne, and Diane Larsen-Freeman. *The Grammar Book*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1983.
- Chalker, Sylvia. *Current English Grammar*. London: Macmillan, 1984.
- Corbett, Edward P. J. *The Little English Handbook*. 2nd Ed. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1977.
- Duggan, John J. "Prepositions and Prepositional Phrases." *Teaching the Grammatical Structures of English: A Manual for Teachers*. Tokyo: Temple Univ. Japan, 1985.
- Herndon, Jeanne H. *A Survey of Modern Grammars*. 2nd Ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976.
- Hodges, John C., And Mary E. Whitten. *Harbrace College Handbook*. 8th Ed. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977.
- Ishibashi, K. *A New College English Grammar*. Tokyo: Seibido, 1956.
- Jespersen, Otto. *Essentials of English Grammar*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1933.
- LaPalombara, Lyda E. *An Introduction to Grammar*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop, 1976.
- Quirk, Randolph, and Sidney Greenbaum. *A University Grammar of English*. Harlow, England: Longman, 1973.
- Shepherd, John, Richard Rossner, and James Taylor. *Ways to Grammar*. London: Macmillan, 1984.

A Comparative Survey of the Preposition and Prepositional Phrase

Thomson, A. J., and A. V. Martinet. *A Practical English Grammar*. 3rd Ed.  
London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980.