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## A Syntactic and semantic Analysis of Arabic and English Prepositions

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### Article Information

### Abstract

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It is no wonder that prepositions create some troubles for learners of English as a second or a foreign language. Therefore, this research is mainly intended to analyze syntactically and semantically the prepositions in both languages Arabic and English in order to find the major similarities and differences between them. If the teacher of any foreign language knows about the various aspects of the learners' mother tongue and the language they are learning, it will be possible for him to predict the mistakes his learners are likely to commit and correct them by preparing remedial exercises.

This research, therefore, will be divided into four main parts. The first and second are mainly devoted for the analysis of the prepositions in Arabic and English respectively in terms of function and meaning. The third part will be devoted for the analysis of data. The fourth part contains conclusion

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## دراسة تحليلية دلالية لحروف الجر في اللغتين العربية والانكليزية

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### ملخص البحث

يقدم هذا البحث دراسة تحليلية دلالية لحروف الجر في اللغتين العربية والانكليزية من أجل الوقوف على اوجه التشابه و الاختلاف بين اللغتين ، وإذا كان مدرس اللغة الاجنبية ملما بمختلف جوانب اللغة الأم واللغة الاجنبية فسوف يكون من السهل عليه النبؤ بالأخطاء التي من الممكن ان يقعوا بها وكذلك تصحيح تلك الأخطاء بإعداد تمارين لغوية لمعالجة تلك الأخطاء .

يقع البحث في أربعة أقسام رئيسية القسم الاول والثاني مخصصين لتحليل حروف الجر في اللغتين العربية والانكليزية على التوالي . في حين خصص الجزء الثالث لتحليل نتائج البحث أما القسم الرابع فقد خصص لنتائج البحث

## Introduction

A preposition is usually defined as a word that is used to indicate the place where an action occurs, the place where someone or something is, the place they are going to or coming from or a the direction they are moving in" (Cobuild 1990: 295). Prepositions also describe a relationship between words in a sentence. In itself a word like 'in or 'after' is rather meaningless and hard to define in mere words. Prepositions need to be combined with other words in structures called prepositional phrases. The prepositional phrase consists of the preposition followed by a noun, a pronoun, or other clauses, the whole phrase, in turn, takes on a modifying role, acting as an adjective or an adverb, locating something in time and space, modifying a noun, or telling when or where or under what conditions something happened. (Internet 1)

### 2- Aims of the Study:

The present study aims at:

1- Analyzing Arabic and English prepositions both syntactically and semantically.

2- Another important aim is to bring out points of contrast as well as points of similarity between the two languages.

### 3- Hypothesis:

Being two different languages (i.e. Arabic and English) it is hypothesized that when analyzed syntactically and semantically there would be aspects of similarity and difference between the two languages concerning prepositions.

### 4- Arabic Prepositions:

Arabic prepositions (حروف الجر Huruwf-ul - Jarr) are twenty in number. They are usually subdivided into two types separable and inseparable. Separable prepositions are (منذ , منذ , في , على , عن , الى , من , لعل , كي , حاشا , عدا , خلا , حتى ) whereas (واو القسم وتاؤه , اللام , الكاف , الباء) are the inseparable ones (Al-Ghalayini, W.D.3: 165-166).

#### 4-1 The Syntactic Functions of the Prepositional Phrase in Arabic:

In Arabic a preposition is always placed before its complement.

The prepositional phrase has several syntactic functions:

1- The prepositional phrase usually acts as a complement of a verb (Aziz, 1989, 187), for example.

ذهب خالد الى السوق - ١

Khalid went to the market.

## بحثت عن الكتاب -2

I Looked for the book

2- The prepositional phrase may occur as an adverb, for example:

رأيت النجوم في السماء -٣

I saw the stars in the sky

مررت بدمشق بالليل -٤

I passed through Damascus at night

(Internet 2)

3- A prepositional phrase also occurs as a complement for the subject in nominal sentences, For example:

خالد في السوق -٥

Khalid is in the market.

الكتاب على الرف -٦

The book is on the shelves

4- The prepositional phrase can act as an adverbial disjunct and Conjunct (Internet 3), for example:

Disjunct : من الواقع ان الامر معقد -7

Clearly this point is complicated

Conjunct : بالرغم من ذلك لم تنجح في الامتحان -8

In spite of that she did not succeed in the exam

5- The Arabic prepositional phrase also occurs as an adjective for the object of the sentence (Internet 2), for example:

رأيت طفلا في سريره -٩

I saw a baby in his bed.

6- A prepositional phrase in Arabic can be used as a modifier of a noun (Aziz, 1989: 184), for example:

نهر العراق في الفاو -١٠

Iraq's victory in faw.

## 4.2. Prepositions Semantically Considered:

### 4.2.1 Prepositions of place:

In Arabic ( إلى and في، من ) are used to denote places (wright, 1971: 132), for example:

قرب الجيش من المعسكر - 11

The army approached the camp.

اقمت في دمشق-12

I stayed in Damascus.

### 4.2.2 prepositions of time:

Prepositions like ( منذ ، مذ، حتى، إلى ، من ) are usually used to indicate time.

(Internet 4), for example:

I was absent since morning

غبت من الضحى - ١٤

I stayed up till dawn

سهرت الى الفجر - ١٥

I stayed up till morning

سهرت حتى الصباح - ١٦

I haven't met him for two days

ما قابلته مذ يومان - ١٧

I haven't met him for two days

ما قابلته منذ يومان - ١٨

### 4.2.3 Prepositions of possession :

The Arabic preposition (اللام) is used mainly to denote possession

(Internet 2), for example:

We are God's

انا لله - ١٩

The book is mine

الكتاب لي - ٢٠

The saddle belongs to the horse.

السرج للفرس-21

### 4.2.4. prepositions of resemblance:

In Arabic ( الكاف ) is the only preposition which is used to express resemblance (wright, 1971, 177), for example:

هذا الولد كأبيه - ٢٢

This boy is like his father

جئت كزيد -32

I came like zeid

#### 4.2.5 Prepositions of cause and reason:

(الكاف ، الباء ، اللام ، في ، عن ، من ) are usually used to express cause and reason, (Dhafar, 1998: 440), for example

مات من المرض -٢٤

He died because of illness

جئت هنا عن موعد -٢٥

I came here because of an appointment

دخلت امرأة النار في هرة حبستها -26

"Verily a woman entered Hell because of a cat which she confined without food."

ضربته للتأديب -27

I beat him to correct him

(فبظلم من الذين هادوا حرمنا عليهم طيبات أحلت لهم وبصدهم عن سبيل الله كثيرا) -28

(النساء : 160)

(Because of the Jews' iniquity, we made unlawful for them certain (foods) good and wholesome which had been lawful for them) (Ali, 1989: 231).

(واذكروه كما هداكم وان كنتم) -٢٩

(البقرة: ١٩٨)

(and celebrate his praises as he directed you) (Ali, 1989: 80).

#### 4.2.6 prepositions of Accompaniment:

The Arabic prepositions which express accompaniment are ( مع ، الباء ، في )

(Dhafar, 1998: 440), for example:

أقبلت في نسوة من الحي - ٣٠

She forward with (some) women of the tribe.

اشترى المنزل بأثاثه - ٣١

He bought the house with the furniture.

ذهب مع اخيه - ٣٢

He went with his brother.

#### 4.2.7 Prepositions of Exception:

( خلا ، عدا ، حاشا ) are the Arabic prepositions which express exception (ziadeh and winder, 1957: 421), for example:

جاء القوم { خلا  
عدا  
حاشا } عليا - ٣٣

All came except Ali.

#### 4.3 The use of Arabic prepositions as Nouns:

In Arabic it is possible to use some prepositions as nouns

AL- Ghalayini, W.D. 3: 174) These preposition are ( عن ، على ، مذ ، منذ )

for example:

جاء عن شمالي - ٣٤

He came from my left side.

سقط من على الجبل - ٣٥

He fell over the mountain

ما أكل منذ { يوم السبت ٣٦  
مذ

He did not eat since Saturday

#### 4.4 The use of Arabic prepositions as verbs:

Dhafar (1998: 394-430) states that in Arabic ( خلا ، عدا ، حاشا ) can be used as prepositions and as verbs if they are preceded by the redundant (مـ), for example:

رجع المسافرون ما خلا احمد - ٣٧

All the travelers came except Ahmed.

حضر الطلاب ما عدا زيدا - ٣٨

All the students attended except zeid

عوقب الطلاب ما حاشا عليا - ٣٩

All the students were punished except Ali.

## 5- English Prepositions:

In English a preposition is usually defined as a word which opens up the possibilities of saying more about a thing or an action, because you can choose any appropriate noun group after it as its object. Prepositions most often come before a noun. They never change their form, regardless of the case, gender etc. of the word they are referring to (Internet 5), ... for example:

- After class.
- At home.
- Before Tuesday.
- In London.
- With pleasure.

English prepositions are usually classified as simple and complex . Simple prepositions consist of one word. The following are the most common simple prepositions in English:

About	before	despite	Near	Since	Up
above	behind	down	Of	Through	Upon
Across	below	during	Off	throughout	With
After	beneath	expect	On	Till	Within
Against	beside	for	Onto	To	Without
Along	between	from	Out	Toward	
Among	beyond	inside	outside	Under	
Around	but	Into	Over	Underneath	
At	by	Like	Past	Until	

(Internet 1)

Complex prepositions are more than one word; (in between) and (because of) are prepositions made up of two words, (in front of) and (on behalf of) are prepositions made of three words, for example:

40- The book is in between War and Peace and the Lord of the Rings.



41- The book is in front of the clock.

#### 5.1. The syntactic Functions of the prepositional phrase in English:

A prepositional phrase in English consists of a preposition and its object, which is nearly always a noun group (Quirk et al., 1985: 299). Both elements must be present. Muir (1979: 50) calls them the "preposition" and "complement". This structure is usually shown as such: PC

P	C
UP	the hill
P	C
on	the roof
P	C
under	the counter
P	C
out	the river
P	C
In spite of	the Wind

Muir's structure (PC) shows that the English prepositions are usually placed before their complements. However, there are certain cases in which prepositions are postposed to a final position within the sentence (Quirk et al., 1985: 300):

a- If the object of the preposition is a relative pronoun (i.e. that, whom, which, and who), for example:

42- I have the book that you look for.

43- the man whom you saw yesterday is my neighbour.

44- He has received the money which I sent him.

45- The men who will be playing on Saturday all belong to our local club.

b- If the object of the preposition is an interrogative, for example:

46- where are you from?

47- what are you looking for?

c- A preposition could be postposed to a final position for the sake of emphasis (Biber et. al, 2002: 28), for example:

48- This I insist on.

49- He is known the entire world over.

d- In Exclamation

50- What a mess she's got into!

e- A preposition could be postposed to a final position with (-ing) clauses (Internet 6), for example:

51- He's worth listening to.

f- with an infinitive purpose a preposition could be postposed to final position, for example:

52- Here is a chair to sit on.

53- He is so nice to be with.

Cobuild (1990: 297) states that sometimes in descriptive writings and reports for the sake of emphasis the prepositional phrase can be put at the beginning of the clause, for example:

54- In the garden everything was quiet.

In English the prepositional phrase has the following syntactic functions:

1- A prepositional phrase in English can act as a complementation of a verb, i.e it completes the meaning of the verb (Internet 7), for example:

55- The woman relies on her babysitter.

2- The prepositional phrase can also act as a complement of an adjective (Ibid), for example:

56- Librarians are fond of books.

3- prepositional phrases also function as adjuncts within the sentence. Disjuncts frame an entire sentence and are optional, for example:

57- In my opinion, grammar is interesting.

In addition to that prepositional phrases can function as adverbials which are similar to adjuncts because adverbials also provide additional information about an entire sentence and are optional. Adverbials, however, express information such as time, place, manner, condition, reason or purpose of an entire sentence (Internet 8), for example:

58- The children played in the backyard.

4- A preposition with its complementation acts as post modifier of a noun phrase (Aziz: 1989: 184), for example:

59- The man outside is my brother.

## 5.2 Prepositions Semantically Considered:

### 5.2.1 Prepositions of place:

In English prepositions such as (on, at, in and near) are usually used to indicate the place where an action occurs, or the place where someone or something is (Quirk et.al., 1985: 307), for Example:

60- There are two books on the table.

61- I will meet you at the station.

62- Ahmed is in the water.

63- He stood near the door.

### 5.2.2 prepositions of time:

Prepositions like (at, in, on, by, for, during, before, after, since, until and till) are usually used to denote time (Internet 1), for example:

64- John went to Paris at 9 o'clock.

65- I'll see you in the afternoon.

- 66- My sister got married on 14 th May.
- 67- I'll be there by 9 o'clock.
- 68- I haven't seen Andrew for two weeks.
- 69- I was in England during the summer.
- 70- The airplane will arrive before 6 p.m.
- 71- We ate in a restaurant after the film.
- 72- He has been ill since Monday.
- 73- We were waiting him till 5 o'clock.
- until }

### 5.2.3 Prepositions of Possession:

In English there are some prepositions which denote possession such as (of, with and without) (Chalker, 1989: 112), for example:

- 74- He is a friend of mine.
- 75-I saw a man with a long black beard.
- 76- The house is without a porch.

#### 5.2.4 Prepositions of Resemblance

In English the preposition (like) expresses resemblance (Ibid), for example:

- 77- She behaves like her mother.
- 78- He is just like his father.

### 5.2.5 prepositions of Cause and Reason

(out of, to, and because of) are mainly used to denote causative (Beaumont and Granger, 1989: 210), for example:

- 79- He lost his leg because of the accident.
- 80- To my surprise, nobody replied to the advertisement.

81- She acted out of spite.

#### 5.2.6 Prepositions of Exception:

Prepositions like (except and but) are used to express exception in English (Internet 9), for example:

82-I wake up at 7 a.m. except Friday.

83- All came but Ali.

#### 5.2.7 Prepositions of Accompaniment:

Prepositions like (with and without) are usually used to denote accompaniment, for example:

84- She came with him.

85- She came without him.

#### 5.3 The use of English preposition as conjunctions:

In English there are some prepositions which are used as conjunctions such as (before, after, and since) (Ibid: 257), for example:

86- They had gone home before they finished their work.

87- They went home after they had finished their work.

88- They haven't visited us since we returned from Paris

#### 6. Data Analysis:

The findings of analysis of prepositions in Arabic and English syntactically and semantically revealed that there are various aspects of similarity and difference between the two languages:

1. The prepositions in Arabic are few in number, whereas the preposition in English are more.

2. In Arabic we have two types of prepositions: separable and inseparable prepositions. The two types in English are termed simple and complex prepositions. The compound prepositions may be subdivided into two or three word sequence. This is not found in Arabic.

3. In Arabic the preposition is always placed before its object. In English the preposition is usually put before its object except the six cases mentioned earlier when the preposition is postposed to a final position within the sentence.
4. Both in Arabic and English the preposition with its complement occur as a complement of a verb.
5. Both the Arabic and the English prepositional phrases act as adjunct and adverbial.
6. In Arabic a prepositional phrase occurs as an adjective for the object of the sentence In English the case is completely different a prepositional phrase occurs as a complement of an adjective.
7. In Arabic a prepositional phrase acts as a predicate for the subject which is not possible in English.
8. In Arabic and English a prepositional phrase occurs as a noun modifier.
9. In Arabic the prepositions (الى، في ، من) are used to indicate place.  
In English (on, at, in, near) are used to indicate place.
10. To indicate time in Arabic the prepositions (منذ، منذ، حتى، الى، من) are normally used. In English (at, in, on, by, for, during, before, after, since, until and till) are usually used to indicate time.
11. In Arabic (اللام) is the only preposition which is used to denote possession, whereas, in English (of, with, and without) are used to indicate the same meaning.
12. To indicate likeness in Arabic the preposition (الكاف) is used. In English (like) is used to indicate the meaning.
13. For cause and reason (الكاف، الباء، اللام، في ، عن ، من) are used in Arabic. In English the preposition (out of, to, and because of) are used for cause and reason.
14. Prepositions like (مع، الباء، في) are used in Arabic to indicate accompaniment. In English (with and without) are usually used in
15. In Arabic, exception is usually indicated by the use of- (حاشا ، عدا، خلا ) as prepositions. In English (except and but) are used to indicate the same meaning.

16. In Arabic the preposition ( عن ، على ، مذ ، منذ ) can be used as nouns. In English prepositions do not occur as nouns.

17. ( حاشا، عدا، خلا ) in Arabic are used both as prepositions and as verbs. In English no preposition can be used as a verb.

18. In English the prepositions (before, after, and since) can be used as conjunctions. In Arabic prepositions cannot be used as conjunctions.

#### 7- Conclusion:

The analysis of prepositions in Arabic and English reveals that there are various aspects of similarity and difference between the two languages. Each language has its specific rule, therefore, learners and teachers of English as a foreign language should be aware of this fact. That is to say, being aware of the differences between the two languages, learners would be able to avoid possible problems when producing utterances in English. Similarities, on the other hand, would be an important factor in facilitating the learning process. Finally, if teachers of English are aware of the various aspects of the learners' mother tongue (i.e. Arabic) and the language they are teaching (i.e. English) they would be able to predict the kind of errors that students are likely to make while learning English, and therefore to prepare remedial exercises

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