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FORMAL PROPERTIES OF PREPOSING IN ENGLISH

The paper focuses on one of the information-packaging constructions in English: preposing, and its subtypes discussed on the basis of their formal properties. Preposing is considered in declarative sentences, of elements such as objects, subject complements and adverbial modifiers realized by both phrases and clauses, as well as in comparative, imperative and exclamative sentences. In addition some special kinds of preposing are also reviewed, such as preposing in subordinate clauses, preposing of multiple elements and preposing of parts of clause elements. The occurrence of the subtypes of preposing has been tested in a written corpus of 50,000 words, and the majority of the examples in this paper are obtained from this corpus.

Keywords: preposing, types and subtypes of preposing, English, written corpus.

1. Introduction

Sentences with preposing are described in the three voluminous English grammar books: *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* and *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* [1; 2; 3]. This study focuses on a systematical presentation of the subtypes of preposing with regard to the formal properties of the preposed element. In addition the occurrence of these subtypes has been tested in a written corpus of 50,000 words, and the examples in this paper, unless stated otherwise, are obtained from this corpus (see Appendix 1).

2. Preposing as an information-packaging construction

According to Huddleston and Pullum [1, p. 1365], in language, «there are a number of clause constructions which we refer to collectively as information-packaging constructions, and which differ syntactically from the most basic, or canonical, constructions in the language. These non-canonical constructions characteristically have a syntactically more basic counterpart differing not in truth condition or illocutionary meaning but in the way the informational content is presented». Thus «the syntax makes available differing ways of ‘saying the same thing’, with the various versions differing in the way the content is organized informationally» [ibid].

Quirk et al. [2, p. 89] note that users of language may «suppress those elements of meaning which are informationally predictable, and to highlight those which are informationally important», and considerations like these «interact with processes which involve varying the position of elements in the sentence».

According to Biber et al. [3, p. 898] «English word order has often been described as fixed» pointing out that «it is certainly true that the placement of the core elements of the clause is strictly regulated». Thus, although «the word order of

English clauses is determined by the interaction of a number of factors, first and most important, however, word order is used as a grammar signal” [ibid] i. e. as a way to easily identify the clause elements. Biber et al. [3, p. 898] defines marked word order as order “where core clause elements are placed in an unusual position to achieve cohesion, emphasis, or some other stylistic effect”. One type of constructions with marked word order in English involves the sentences with preposing.

3. Preposing: general characteristics

Preposing (aka fronting, topicalization, leftward extraction) refers to the initial placement of core elements which are normally found in post-verbal position [3, p. 900]. An example of preposing is given below, and in it the preposed element is underlined and its empty position is indicated by a line.

(1) That we can arrange _____. (preposing)

Huddleston and Pullum [1, p. 1374] distinguish two types of preposing. The first type is focus preposing, also known as *topicalization*, in which “the preposed complement is, or contains, the focus”, or one of the two foci associated with fronting, i.e. the beginning and the end of a sentence. The second type is non-focus preposing, in which the preposed complements “will certainly be stressed, for preposing does accord them a significant amount of intonational prominence, but the degree of stress will be less than on the final words”. This second type is also called *Yiddish movement* as shown in the example below, adopted from Sag and Levine [4]:

(2) A dime I wouldn't give him ____ for that! (Yiddish movement)

According to Biber et al. [3, p. 900] “fronting of core elements is virtually restricted to declarative main clauses, and is relatively rare in English” with c. 50–100 occurrences per million words in conversation and news and c. 200–300 occurrences per million words in academic prose and fiction. However, Biber et al. [3] do not include fronting of adverbials in the above statistics, about which the authors say that there is “much greater flexibility” in comparison to the placement of other core elements. According to Quirk et al. [2, p. 498] the end position is “the position of the obligatory adverbial when it follows the other obligatory elements”, and “fronting of a predication adjunct exceptionally occurs for rhetorical purposes” [2, p. 1074]. Quirk et al. [2, p. 1074] remark that the initial position “is associated with those adverbials that can readily constitute the ground, theme or 'scene-setting' for what follows. It is thus particularly appropriate for sentence adjuncts, disjuncts, and conjuncts”. The authors also note that “semantically, the initial position has a strong association with the expression of time”. The statistics presented by Quirk et al. [2, p. 501] shows that “the higher proportion of closed class items at initial position reflects the tendency to begin sentences with one of a small number of short conjuncts such as *then, now, yet*, and above all (in speech) *well*”. Discussing the possible positions of adverbials Quirk et al. [2, p. 490–491] state that the selection of one position rather than another is influenced by several factors, but chief among them is the information structure of the sentence”.

The position of the adverbial changes the meaning of a negative sentence depending on whether the adverbial has a scope over the negation of vice versa as the examples from Huddleston and Pullum [5, p. 157] below show. In (3i) the negation has a scope over *deliberately*, and in (3ii) *deliberately* has a scope over the negation

- (3) i. *I didn't omit my name deliberately.*
 ii. *I deliberately didn't omit my name.*

4. Types of preposing

a. Preposing in declarative sentences.

According to Huddleston [6, p. 454] the types of main clause elements that can be fronted are object, subject complement and adverbial modifier. All these elements may be realized by both phrases or clauses as illustrated by the examples below, in which the respective preposed element is underlined and the empty position is indicated by a line.

- preposed object. In English, the preposed object is placed in initial pre-subject position as in the examples with direct phrasal and clausal objects, and a prepositional phrasal object:

(4) That we can arrange _____. (preposed phrasal direct object)

(5) What Alex Rivers needed, Alex Rivers would get _____.
 (preposed clausal direct object)

(6) *She would accept nothing but the world of amusement, and the serious people of her life were the animals she had for pets. On those she lavished, almost ironically, her affection and her companionship* _____.
 (preposed phrasal prepositional object)

- preposed subject complement. The example below shows a preposed phrasal subject complement.

(7) *And very nice years they were* _____. (preposed subject complement)

- preposed adverbial modifier.

There is much variability in the preposing of adverbial modifiers due to the fact that their unmarked position is the final sentence position, after all other obligatory elements. Types (i) and (ii) below will show preposed adverbial modifiers in initial and mid positions, respectively.

(i) preposed adverbial modifier in initial position

(8) *Just last week she had hung on the wall a picture of herself in her police constable's uniform, taken seventeen years ago, looking young and eager* _____.
 (preposed phrasal adverbial modifier)

It is interesting to note that in example (8) there is also the adverbial modifier *on the wall* which is placed before the heavy direct object. Displacements of this kind are discussed as object postponement with "one major factor that motivates postponing is weight: there is a tendency or preference for heavy constituents to appear late in the clause" [1, p. 1382].

- (9) *As soon as the staff begin arriving, rumors will spread ____.*
(preposed clausal adverbial modifier)

(ii) preposed adverbial modifier in mid position

According to Biber et al. [3, p. 771] the mid position of adverbial modifiers includes all positions between obligatory initial and final clausal elements. This means that the adverbial may appear: between the subject and the verb phrase – in examples (10) and (11); and between the operator and the head verb – in example (12):

- (10) *Susan immediately noticed the picture on the wall.*
(preposed phrasal adverbial modifier)
- (11) *Walter, not seeing the little neck-slicing gesture that Patty was making, pressed on.*
(preposed clausal adverbial modifier)
- (12) *She had only just begun to make the place her own.*
(preposed phrasal adverbial modifier)

b. Preposing in comparative sentences.

Preposing occurs in the type of “more-the-merrier-constructions” [4]:

- (13) *The more she got to know him ____, the better she liked him ____.*
(more-the-merrier-construction, example adopted from [4])

c. Preposing in imperative sentences.

- (14) *Anything you don't eat put ____ back in the fridge.*
(preposing in an imperative, example adopted from [1])

d. Preposing in subordinate sentences.

Huddleston [6, p. 455] notes that “in general, fronting is more acceptable in subordinate clauses when their content is part of the new information that the speaker is asserting, suggesting and the like” as in the examples below adopted from [6, p. 455]:

- (15) *I suspect that the revised edition he hasn't yet read ____.*
(preposing in a subordinate clause)

With the subordinators *as* and *though* special structures are observed [3, 4] called though-fronting and as-fronting

- (16) *Early though it was ____, his brain had fired up like the V12 engine in his Ferrari.*
(*though-fronting*)
- (17) *As happy as they might appear to be ____, nonetheless...*
(*as-fronting* as in the example from [4])

e. Preposing in exclamations.

Wh-exclamatives contain a *wh*-word which is a marker syntactically conditioning fronting [3, p. 909]

- (18) *What a dirty face you've got ____!*
(preposing in a *wh*-exclamative, BNC example)

Preposing also occurs in exclamations not introduced by a *wh*-word as in the two examples below adopted from Biber et al. [3, p. 909]:

- (19) *Some diet that is ___!* (preposing in a non *wh*-exclamative)
 (20) *And she though: Such a sure hand my son has ___ with people!*
 (preposing in a *such*-exclamative)

f. Preposing of multiple elements.

The corpus study of preposing has revealed preposing of multiple elements, a type not mentioned in the literature sources. The two examples below show that more than one element, phrasal or/and clausal, may be preposed:

- (21) *So, in the end, and with great trepidation, she had told Stanley everything.*
 (preposing of three phrasal adverbial modifiers)
 (22) *In that moment, as he struggled to master his profound emotion, she saw both his strength and his sensitivity, and she felt strongly drawn to him.*
 (preposing of two adverbial modifiers, one phrasal and one clausal)

g. Preposing of parts of clause elements.

According to Huddleston [6, p. 454] the following parts of clause elements can be preposed resulting into a discontinuous phrase/clause:

- the complement in a phrase:

- (23) *The others we are still looking into ___.*
 (complement in a prepositional phrase, example adopted from [6, p. 454])
 (24) *There are fundamental misconceptions, I'm sure ___.*
 (complement in an adjective phrase)

- part of an embedded clause:

- (25) *No, this time I think we have it ____.*
 (preposed adverbial modifier from an embedded clause)
 (26) *"These you see I have had to accommodate ___ elsewhere," he explained.*
 (preposed direct object from an embedded clause)

- a main verb plus its complements but less its auxiliaries may be also fronted. Biber et al. [3, p. 905] call this type fronted infinitive predicates when these repeat or echo a previous verb (or predicate):

- (27) *I promise to finish it, and finish it I shall ___.*
 (proposing of a verb + complement, example adopted from [6, p. 454])

5. Conclusion

a. Formally, preposing is phrasal, clausal, partially phrasal, partially clausal or of multiple elements (both phrasal and/or clausal). This last type has been identified on the basis of the conducted corpus study of preposing in English.

b. Preposing occurs in a variety of clauses: simple declarative, subordinate, comparative, imperative, exclamative. Further research can focus on the extent to which preposing may be considered obligatory in some of these types, which would not make sense to consider proposing an information-packaging construction in these cases.

Literary sources for the examples used in the paper

1. Examples 1, 4, 7 and 11 are obtained from Franzen J. Freedom. – New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.

2. Examples 5 is obtained from Picoult J. Picture Perfect, Berkley Books, New York, 1995.

3. Example 6 is obtained from Lawrence D.H. Women in Love. – London: CRW Publishing Limited, 2005.

4. Examples 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 16, 21 and 22 are obtained from Follet K. Whiteout. – The Dutton Publishing Group, 2005.

5. Examples 24 is obtained from Boyd W. Brazzaville Beach. – Sinclair-Stevenson, 1990.

6. Examples 25 and 26 are obtained from Forsyth F. The Day of the Jackal. – Penguin Books Ltd. 1971.

7. Examples 2, 3, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 23 and 27 are not from the research corpus and their source is indicated in the paper.

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ФОРМАЛЬНЫЕ СВОЙСТВА ПРЕПОЗИЦИИ В АНГЛИЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ

Статья посвящена одной из информативно нагруженных конструкций английского языка – предпозитии и ее разновидностям, которые рассматриваются с точки зрения их формальных свойств. Предпозитии рассматривается в повествовательных предложениях относительно таких элементов, как дополнение, дополнение к подлежащему или обстоятельство, выраженных как простой группой слов, так и предложениями, а также в сравнительных, повелительных и восклицательных предложениях. Кроме того, рассматриваются некоторые особые виды предпозитии, такие как предпозитии придаточных предложений, предпозитии нескольких компонентов и предпозитии составных частей членов предложения. Частотность явлений предпозитии проанализирована на корпусе письменных текстов объемом 50 000 слов. Данный корпус явился источником большинства приведенных в статье примеров.

Ключевые слова: *предпозитии, типы и подтипы предлогов, английский язык, корпус письменных текстов.*