

A cognitive sociolinguistic study of prepositional complements of prepositions in English

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This presentation aims to discuss how prepositional complements of prepositions (hereafter, PCOPs) (e.g., *from* *under the table*, *from* *within the company*, and *until* *after his death*) are used in twenty English dialects from a cognitive sociolinguistic perspective. Though prepositions generally take a nominal complement, as in *at* *the door* and *on* *the desk*, they also take prepositional phrases as their complements (Quirk et al. 1985; Huddleston & Pullum 2002).

In previous studies, the nominal use of prepositional phrases was mainly discussed in terms of the prepositional subject (Jawarska 1986; Langacker 1990) (e.g., *Beside the fire* is warmer) while little attention has been paid to PCOPs. However, my previous research included a comprehensive study of PCOPs (e.g., [[PREP₁] [PREP₂ NP]]) in the *British National Corpus*, revealing that various PCOPs are observed when *from* appears in the PREP₁ slot, as in *from* {*behind*, *within*, *under*, *outside*} NP. It also demonstrated that (i) *from* is generally followed by non-prototypical prepositions that have more than one syllable (*At*, *for*, *in*, *on*, and *to* don't follow *from*), and (ii) the PREP₂ can be functionally classified into two types: the emphatic type and the search domain type (see Langacker 1990):

- (1) Emphatic type
 - (a) The project team was chosen from (*within*) *the company*.
 - (b) We collected samples from (*throughout*) *the UK*.
 - (c) The head was elected from (*among*) *the members*.
- (2) Search domain type
 - (a) Something had crawled from *under a stone*. (BNC: CA3: 742)
 - (b) Just then the moon came out from *behind* *a cloud*. (BNC: H9U: 1748)
 - (c) ... he heard shots from *across* *the road* ... (BNC: K6G: 11)

In the emphatic type, the regions illustrated by the noun phrase (underlined) and the PREP₂ phrase (italicized) correspond. That is, the second preposition can be omitted without changing the propositional content of the whole sentence. The function of PREP₂ is to emphasize the region that is illustrated by the noun phrase. In contrast, in the search domain type, the regions illustrated by the noun phrase (underlined) and the PREP₂ phrase (italicized) do not correspond. The PREP₂ refers to the search domain where the target is found.

Following previous studies, this study discusses how various PCOPs headed by *from* are distributed in English dialects with the GloWbE corpus, which consists of 1.9 billion words from twenty English-

speaking countries. The study investigated (i) the distribution of the major patterns of PCOPs that appear more than 1,000 times in the corpus (Table 1) and (ii) typical nouns appearing in PCOPs (Table 2). The results include the following: First, the degree of entrenchment of each PCOP is far from consistent among the twenty dialects, though some subgroups that show similar distributions can be identified (e.g., countries in the inner circle and in South Asia). Second, some PCOPs (e.g., *among(st)*) are strongly entrenched only in a few dialects, though most PCOPs are observed in various dialects. Third, some PCOPs are more associated with English in the outer and expanding circles such as *from* {*within*, *outside*, *before*, and *among*}, while others (e.g., *from under*) are more associated with that in the inner circle. Fourth, typical NPs of PCOPs sometimes differ in different dialects.

Overall, this presentation demonstrates the inconsistent distributions of PCOPs among various dialects, providing the basic data for further cognitively oriented sociolinguistics research (Geeraerts, Kristiansen and Peirsman 2010) including on the different distributions of the two types of PCOPs – and the constructional polysemy of each PCOP – among dialects.

References

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Corpora

BNC: *British National Corpus* (Available at <http://www.corpora.jp/~scn/bnc.html?page=top>)

GloWbE: *Corpus of Global Web-based English* (Available at <https://corpus.byu.edu/glowbe/>)

Table 1: The distribution of PCOPs among 20 English dialects

| | Frequency | US | CA | GB | IE | AU | NZ | IN | LK | PK | BD | SG | MY | PH | HK | ZA | NG | GH | KE | TZ | JM |
|--------------|-----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| from around | 20996 | 3605 | 1612 | 4493 | 1108 | 1760 | 1262 | 986 | 499 | 380 | 444 | 516 | 441 | 325 | 631 | 535 | 290 | 434 | 558 | 674 | 443 |
| from within | 15607 | 2888 | 991 | 3077 | 818 | 1228 | 778 | 1084 | 566 | 604 | 357 | 282 | 377 | 287 | 319 | 371 | 347 | 310 | 380 | 291 | 252 |
| from outside | 13662 | 1824 | 958 | 3055 | 964 | 833 | 500 | 1110 | 467 | 450 | 380 | 245 | 303 | 241 | 325 | 272 | 364 | 376 | 400 | 373 | 222 |
| from across | 11460 | 1651 | 1169 | 2913 | 583 | 690 | 367 | 836 | 216 | 373 | 206 | 207 | 170 | 137 | 159 | 295 | 235 | 317 | 344 | 280 | 312 |
| from behind | 10449 | 2168 | 828 | 2486 | 581 | 759 | 382 | 423 | 226 | 421 | 186 | 190 | 271 | 183 | 155 | 260 | 229 | 178 | 206 | 131 | 186 |
| from among | 5770 | 820 | 344 | 612 | 157 | 198 | 114 | 308 | 272 | 1317 | 218 | 65 | 163 | 190 | 121 | 127 | 178 | 157 | 143 | 144 | 122 |
| from over | 5595 | 920 | 375 | 1275 | 324 | 391 | 242 | 280 | 129 | 103 | 108 | 167 | 130 | 111 | 163 | 141 | 84 | 165 | 214 | 137 | 136 |
| from under | 5582 | 1496 | 417 | 1256 | 355 | 460 | 274 | 207 | 90 | 107 | 66 | 88 | 83 | 99 | 70 | 112 | 79 | 74 | 70 | 64 | 115 |
| from before | 2540 | 601 | 184 | 595 | 130 | 189 | 100 | 87 | 29 | 107 | 34 | 80 | 58 | 39 | 47 | 51 | 30 | 30 | 42 | 43 | 64 |
| from amongst | 1569 | 73 | 31 | 203 | 39 | 54 | 29 | 149 | 67 | 548 | 67 | 16 | 119 | 13 | 20 | 32 | 20 | 7 | 23 | 45 | 14 |
| from beyond | 1137 | 332 | 81 | 237 | 62 | 73 | 46 | 49 | 14 | 30 | 26 | 14 | 15 | 60 | 14 | 13 | 14 | 14 | 14 | 19 | 10 |
| from between | 1130 | 202 | 95 | 267 | 71 | 81 | 53 | 42 | 24 | 41 | 36 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 31 | 26 | 26 | 12 | 21 | 19 | 29 |
| from down | 1056 | 227 | 84 | 226 | 83 | 115 | 51 | 30 | 34 | 44 | 15 | 12 | 15 | 20 | 15 | 18 | 9 | 7 | 12 | 13 | 26 |
| from beneath | 1020 | 188 | 76 | 262 | 61 | 90 | 60 | 34 | 16 | 40 | 17 | 14 | 12 | 13 | 19 | 12 | 14 | 19 | 26 | 24 | 23 |

*The darkness of the blue color shows the degree of entrenchment of the PCOP in each dialect.

Table 2: Typical NPs within PCOPs

| # | PCOP | Typical NPs | 5 | from behind | cloud, desk, counter, door | 10 | from amongst | number, members, workers |
|---|--------------|---------------------------|---|-------------|----------------------------|----|--------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | from around | world, Europe, neck | 6 | from among | a number of people, member | 11 | from beyond | grave, wall, mountain |
| 2 | from within | program, party, community | 7 | from over | boarder, horizon, shoulder | 12 | from between | 10am and 4pm, teeth |
| 3 | from outside | university, interference | 8 | from under | feet, nose, nail, brow | 13 | from down | river, road, valley |
| 4 | from across | World, Europe | 9 | from before | century, war, birth | 14 | from beneath | lash, tree, bed |