

Chapter 10 How Words Stick Together: The Case for Phrases

Additional information and practice

Extended study of prepositional phrases

Constituents of the Prepositional Phrase {PP}

As you know, prepositions create modifying connections between elements in a clause or sentence. For an extended study of this functional word, let's look inside the prepositional phrase {PP} itself. What kinds of observations can you make about the structure of the {PP} based on the next data set? What comes after the preposition? Jot down a few observations below before you read on.

- (1) The cookie on the table is mine! (sE)
- (2) My sister was featured on the cover of the new book. (sE)
- (3) Here's you a piece of pizza.¹ (SAE)
- (4) The cat ran by us. (sE)
- (5) The dog needs scratched for an hour.² (ME)
- (6) He's smiling to the cat.³ (ChE)
- (7) Charles and Ahmed are happy for her. (sE)
- (8) We're really supposed to get out of here on June.⁴ (ChE)

¹ Wood, J. (2015.) 'Dative presentatives', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/dative-presentatives>. Accessed on 2023-09-21). Updated by Katie Martin (2018), Jim Wood (2019).

² Tenny, C. (1998), 'Psych Verbs and Verbal Passives in Pittsburghese', *Linguistics*, 36: 591-98, p. 592.

³ Barrón and San Romón, n.d., p. 30–31; cited in Bayley, R. (2012). "Chicano English," In B. Kortmann, and K. Lunkenheimer, (eds), *The Mouton World Atlas of Variation in English*, 156-165, Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, p. 162.

⁴ Fought, C. (2003), *Chicano English in Context*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 100-101.

(9) So they just pulled on *the side* of him, and they opened the door.⁵ (ChE)

(10) Must have been on *the fifth grade* or so.⁶ (ChE)

Based on the data set above, you may have noticed that what comes after a preposition is a noun-y thing. We have examples of just a noun such as *pizza* in (3), just a pronoun such as *us* in (4) and *her* in (7), and longer {NPs} such as *the table* in (1) and *the new book* in (2). This is strong evidence that a preposition requires an {NP} next to form a {PP}. You may also have noticed, based on the examples above, that many prepositions are small words, often consisting of just two or three letters. This certainly holds for the data set we gave you. Yet, other prepositions such as *between*, *among*, *within*, *throughout*, and *during* are not small words. You may also have noticed the preposition usage in the ChE examples. These ChE preposition patterns are arguably the result of Spanish influence.⁷ Spanish would use *en* for both *in* and *on*, which then accounts for *on June* in (8), for instance.

Let's revisit the fact that a preposition is followed by an {NP} next. Using some of the examples from earlier, we've spelled out the word classes of the words that come after the prepositions:

(1a) The cookie on *the table* is mine! (sE)

prep+det+noun

(2a) My sister was featured on the cover of *the new book*. (sE)

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

prep+det+adj+noun

- (3a) Here's you a piece of pizza.⁸ (SAE)

prep+noun

- (4a) The cat ran by us. (sE)

prep+pronoun

- (5a) The dog needs scratched for an hour.⁹ (ME)

prep+det+noun

- (6a) He's smiling to the cat.¹⁰ (ChE)

prep+det+noun

- (7a) Charles and Ahmed are happy for her. (sE)

prep+pronoun

It looks like a pretty solid pattern: After the preposition, we have a combination of either just nouns or pronouns, or nouns preceded by determiners or preceded by determiners and adjectives.

⁸ Wood, J. (2015.) 'Dative presentatives', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/dative-presentatives>. Accessed on 2023-09-21). Updated by Katie Martin (2018), Jim Wood (2019).

⁹ Tenny, C. (1998), 'Psych Verbs and Verbal Passives in Pittsburghese', *Linguistics*, 36: 591-98, p. 592.

¹⁰ Barrón and San Romón, n.d., p. 30–31; cited in Bayley, R. (2012). "Chicano English," In B. Kortmann, and K. Lunkenheimer, (eds), *The Mouton World Atlas of Variation in English*, 156-165, Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, p. 162.

This structure after the preposition should ring a bell immediately! They look like {NPs}! So, a {PP} follows this formula:

- {PP} = Prep + {NP}

In our discussion of nouns (see chapter 3), we saw that nouns can function in the object-of-the-preposition slot. This is now where we pick up that thread. All the {NPs} belong to their respective preposition and function as the object of that preposition. This means that the preposition's function within the {PP} is that of head word. As part of a {PP}, prepositions belong to a constituent that can play a couple of roles. We turn to those next.

Functions of {PPs}

{PPs} as Adverbials

Let's look at some examples of the kind of work {PPs} do:

- | | | |
|------|---|---------------------------------------|
| (11) | Bob won the race <i>by</i> cheating. (sE) | > The manner in which he won. |
| (12) | I'll be home <i>by</i> noon. (sE) | > An approximate time I'll be home. |
| (13) | Meet me <i>by</i> our school. (sE) | > An approximate place I'll meet you. |

Notice that the entire {PP} is answering particular questions, and that these questions can be used to isolate the constituent that is the {PP}:

- | | |
|-------|--|
| (11a) | Q: <i>How</i> did Bob win? – A: <i>By cheating</i> . |
| (12a) | Q: <i>When</i> will you be home? – A: <i>By noon</i> . |

(13a) Q: *Where* will I meet you? – A: *By our school*.

The {PPs} here help us answer questions related to:

- manner
- time
- place.

Does this remind you of something? It should! Specifically, it should remind you of the types of semantic information adverbs often convey from chapter 5. When {PPs} indicate this kind of information (related to time, place, manner), we say they are functioning as **adverbials**.

Adverbials are sentence elements that are optional. In other words, they are constituents that are not necessary for a sentence to be grammatically complete:

(14) The cat napped *on the couch*. (sE)

(15) The dog needs scratched *for an hour*.¹¹ (ME)

We can delete the entire {PP} in each of the sentences above and be left with a grammatically complete structure—proving that they are, indeed, optional, which means they function as adverbials:

¹¹ Tenny, C. (1998), ‘Psych Verbs and Verbal Passives in Pittsburghese’, *Linguistics*, 36: 591-98, p. 592.

(14a) The cat napped. (sE)

(15a) The dog needs scratched.¹² (ME)

Adverbials can also be moved within the sentence, which means that they are not locked into a specific slot. We can move them from sentence-final position above to sentence-initial position below:

(14b) *On the couch*, the cat napped. (sE)

(15b) *For an hour*, the dog needs scratched.¹³ (ME)

PPs as postmodifiers

In a similar way, {PPs} can function as postmodifiers in a phrase, where they further describe a noun or adjective:

(16) The cookie *on the table* is mine! (sE)

(17) The store *across the street* is having a sale. (sE)

(18) Here's you a piece *of pizza*.¹⁴ (SAE)

(19) Darius is happy *for her*. (sE)

¹² Tenny, C. (1998), 'Psych Verbs and Verbal Passives in Pittsburghese', *Linguistics*, 36: 591-98, p. 592.

¹³ Tenny, C. (1998), 'Psych Verbs and Verbal Passives in Pittsburghese', *Linguistics*, 36: 591-98, p. 592.

¹⁴ Wood, J. (2015.) 'Dative presentatives', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/dative-presentatives>. Accessed on 2023-09-21). Updated by Katie Martin (2018), Jim Wood (2019).

In (16), it's not just any cookie. Rather, it's the one *on the table* that the sentence is about. That means *on the table* describes the noun *cookie* in more detail. The same applies to the remaining examples. In each, the italicized {PPs} add detail to the noun that comes before it, or the adjective that comes before it (as in (19)). Keep in mind that {PPs}, at the phrase level, can function as postmodifiers in {NPs} and {AdjPs}.

Phrases – a different way to visualize function and form

Charts are another way to visually represent both form and function of phrase components. Chart 1 and chart 2 are two examples.

	<i>cuddly</i>	<i>cats</i>
Function in {NP}	PRE	Head
Form	AdjP	N

Chart 1: Function and Form – Example 1

	<i>extremely hungry</i>	<i>dogs</i>
Function in {NP}	PRE	Head
Form	AdjP	N

Chart 2: Function and Form – Example 2

Let's look at another chart for clarity, step-by-step. Our {AdvP} *extremely* consists of just a head:

{AdvP}	Extremely
Function	Head
Form	ADV

Chart 2: {AdvP} only

As a phrase, this {AdvP} functions as the PRE in the {AdjP} *extremely hungry*:

{AdjP}	extremely	hungry
Function	PRE	HEAD
Form	AdvP	ADJ

Chart 3: {AdvP} embedded in {AdjP}

And then this entire {AdjP} *extremely hungry* itself functions as the PRE in the {NP} *extremely hungry dogs*:

{NP}	extremely hungry	dogs
function	PRE	HEAD
Form	AdjP	N

Chart 4: {AdjP} embedded in {NP}

We can use one big chart to show how both {AdvP} and {AdjP} are embedded in the {NP}:

{NP}	Extremely hungry		dogs
function	PRE		HEAD
Form	AdjP		N
Function	PRE	head	
Form	AdvP	ADJ	
Function	head		
Form	ADV		

Chart 5: {AdvP} embedded in {AdjP} embedded in {NP}

When you look at these kinds of charts, you'd start at the top, with the largest unit, which is the entire {NP}. The functional slots that are filled in this {NP} are PRE and HEAD. The PRE is filled by an {AdjP}, the HEAD is filled by the noun *dog*. Then, in line 3, we look inside the {AdjP}, and we start with functional slots again. In this {AdjP}, the PRE and HEAD slots are filled. The PRE is the {AdvP} *extremely*, and the HEAD is filled by the adjective itself. The last two lines illustrate what the {AdvP} is made up of: Only the functional slot of HEAD is filled, and the form that fills it is the adverb *extremely* itself.

Here's another example:

{NP}	gifts	for	the	neighbors
-------------	--------------	------------	------------	------------------

function	HEAD	POST	
form	N	PP	
function		HEAD	PC
form		PREP	NP
function		DET	HEAD
form		def. art.	N

Chart 6: {PP} embedded in an {NP}

You'd again start at the top of the chart, with the largest constituent, which is the {NP} in this case. This {NP} consists of a HEAD and a POST. The form of the HEAD is a noun (*gifts*), and the form of the POST is a {PP}. This {PP} itself has two functional slots filled: The HEAD (the preposition) and the PC. Now, the form of this PC is another {NP}: *the neighbors*. This {NP}, which—again—functions as the PC within the {PP}, itself consists of two functional slots: the DET and HEAD. The DET is filled with an indefinite article, and the HEAD is filled with a noun.

Chart 7 below visualizes how this phrase breaks down differently, and explicitly names the functional slots in each phrase, so it is more detailed.

{NP}	an	unbelievably adorable		kitten	on the pillow behind the couch
function	DET	PRE		HEAD	POST
form	Indefinite article	AdjP		N	PP
function		PRE	HEAD		HEAD + PC
form		AdvP	ADJ		PREP NP
function		HEAD			DET+ HEAD +POST
form		ADV			def. article N PP
function					HEAD + PC
form					PREP NP
function					DET
form					+HEAD
form					def. art. N

Chart 7: {NP} with embedded phrases

Note that the entire POST is *on the pillow behind the couch*. This {PP} has its PC (*the pillow behind the couch*), which itself is an {NP} and consists of a DET, HEAD, and POST. This POST is another {PP}, which has its own {NP}. You can see that we could easily expand this {NP} into something even longer. Can you come up with a longer version? And can you break it down in chart form like this one, too?

More practice from Exercise 4

Find all complete {AdjPs} in the sentences below. Then, identify all PREs, HEADs, POSTs (as applicable). There might be more than one {AdjP} in a sentence.

- a) The two-thousands finna be considered old.¹⁵ (AAE)
- b) After all, this topic was not so hard to explain. (sE)

More practice from Exercise 5

Find all complete {AdvPs} in the sentences below. Then, label all PREs, HEADs, and POSTs. There might be more than one {AdvP} in a sentence.

- a) John was a-talkin' so loud my eardrums hurt.¹⁶ (AE)
- b) He was really a-starin' at the picture.¹⁷ (AE)

More practice from Exercise 6

Identify the {PPs} by performing the movement test. Identify the head, PC, and any PREs (if included).

- a) He's putting a towel in his head.¹⁸ (ChE)
- b) Don't nobody be hoopin' at Rogue Park.¹⁹ (AAE)

¹⁵ Farrington, C., T. Kendall, P. S. Brooks, L. Jenson, C. Tacata, and J. McLean (2020), *The Corpus of Regional African American Language: ATL* (Atlanta, GA 2017). Version 2020.05. The Online Resources for African American Language Project. <https://oraal.github.io/coraal>. Transcript ID ATL_se0_ag1_f_01_1.

¹⁶ Matyiku, S. (2011), 'A-prefixing', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/a-prefixing>. Accessed on 2024 -02-24). Updated by Tom McCoy (2015) and Katie Martin (2018).

¹⁷ Matyiku, S. (2011), 'A-prefixing', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/a-prefixing>. Accessed on 2024 -02-24). Updated by Tom McCoy (2015) and Katie Martin (2018).

¹⁸ Barrón and San Romón, n.d., p. 30–31; cited in Bayley, R. (2012). "Chicano English," In B. Kortmann, and K. Lunkenheimer, (eds), *The Mouton World Atlas of Variation in English*, 156-165, Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, p. 162.

¹⁹ Baker-Bell, A. (2020), *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity and Pedagogy*, New York: Routledge, p. 74.

Supplemental Exercise 1 – {NPs}

Find the {NPs} in the sentences below and place [] around each {NP}. Identify the head, any DETs, PREs, and any POSTs.

Example (all {NPs} bolded, labeled underneath. H=Head, D=DET):

Here's [me] [a good pair of jeans].^{lxxi} (Kentucky English/SAE)
H D PRE H POST (of jeans) within "of jeans," "jeans" = H

1. Many talented soccer players have received competitive offers from multiple teams. (sE)
2. They are tremendously excited to tie their pink laces for the upcoming game. (sE)
3. John was a-talkin' so loud my eardrums hurt.²⁰ (AE)
4. He was really a-starin' at the picture.²¹ (AE)
5. Alls I want is new shoes.²² (ME)
6. They are leaving on a great adventure; you should go with.²³ (ME)
7. Here's you a piece of pizza.²⁴ (Kentucky English/SAE)
8. Looks like Android Developers are less happier when compared to iPhone Developers.²⁵ (AE/AAE)
9. She is the oldest player on the team. (sE)

Supplemental Exercise 2 – {AdjPs}

Find the {ADJPs} in the sentences below. Identify the head, any PREs and any POSTs.

1. It was in the apple that the witch had gave Snow White that wasn't poisonous.²⁶ (ChE)
2. These were exceptionally expensive when they barely came out.²⁷ (ChE)

²⁰ Matyiku, S. (2011), 'A-prefixing', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/a-prefixing>. Accessed on 2024-02-24). Updated by Tom McCoy (2015) and Katie Martin (2018).

²¹ Matyiku, S. (2011), 'A-prefixing', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/a-prefixing>. Accessed on 2024-02-24). Updated by Tom McCoy (2015) and Katie Martin (2018).

²² Wood, J. (2013), 'The Alls construction', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/alls-construction>. Accessed on 2021-2-19). Updated by Tom McCoy (2015), Katie Martin (2018), and Oliver Shoulson (2020).

²³ Kaplan, A. (2015), 'Come with', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/come-with>. Accessed on 2024-03-22). Updated by Tom McCoy (2015) and Katie Martin (2018).

²⁴ Wood, J. (2015.) 'Dative presentatives', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/dative-presentatives>. Accessed on 2023-09-21). Updated by Katie Martin (2018), Jim Wood (2019).

²⁵ Wood, J. (2012), 'Double comparatives', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*, (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/double-comparatives>. Accessed on 2020-11-07). Updated by Tom McCoy (2015) and Katie Martin (2018).

²⁶ Bayley, R., and O. Santa Ana (2004), 'Chicano English: Morphology and Syntax', In B. Kortmann, B., E. Schneider, K. Burridge, R. Mesthrie, and C. Upton, (eds), *A Handbook of Varieties of English*, vol. 2, 374-90, Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter. p.171.

²⁷ Fought, C. (2003), *Chicano English in Context*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 45.

3. Many talented soccer players have received competitive offers from multiple teams. (sE)
4. They are tremendously excited to tie their pink laces for the upcoming game. (sE)
5. Alls I want is new shoes.²⁸ (ME)
6. Here's me a good pair of jeans.²⁹ (Kentucky English/SAE)
7. Looks like Android Developers are less happier when compared to iPhone Developers.³⁰ (AE/AEE)
8. Anne found the topic extremely easy to explain. (sE)

Supplemental Exercise 3 – {PPs}

Find all the {PPs} in the sentences below. Identify the head, any PREs, and the PC.

1. You used to go stand in the porch and look at the TV through the window.³¹ (ChE)
2. We start on July.³² (ChE)
3. The movie corresponded loosely to the novel it was based on. (sE)
4. She was a-goin' to the show.³³ (AE)
5. I heard him a-fussin' about taxes.³⁴ (AE)
6. Yesterday we play another team for the championship.³⁵ (AAE)
7. They are leaving on a great adventure; you should go with.³⁶ (ME)
8. Alls Alice brought to the party was bread.³⁷ (ME)

²⁸ Wood, J. (2013), 'The Alls construction', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/alls-construction>. Accessed on 2021-2-19). Updated by Tom McCoy (2015), Katie Martin (2018), and Oliver Shoulson (2020).

²⁹ Wood, J. (2015). 'Dative presentatives', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/dative-presentatives>. Accessed on 2023-09-21). Updated by Katie Martin (2018), Jim Wood (2019).

³⁰ Wood, J. (2012), 'Double comparatives', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*, (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/double-comparatives>. Accessed on 2020-11-07). Updated by Tom McCoy (2015) and Katie Martin (2018).

³¹ Bayley, R., and O. Santa Ana (2004), 'Chicano English: Morphology and Syntax', In B. Kortmann, B., E. Schneider, K. Burridge, R. Mesthrie, and C. Upton, (eds), *A Handbook of Varieties of English*, vol. 2, 374-90, Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, p.175.

³² Bayley, R., and O. Santa Ana (2004), 'Chicano English: Morphology and Syntax', In B. Kortmann, B., E. Schneider, K. Burridge, R. Mesthrie, and C. Upton, (eds), *A Handbook of Varieties of English*, vol. 2, 374-90, Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, p.175.

³³ Matyiku, S. (2011), 'A-prefixing', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/a-prefixing>. Accessed on 2024 -02-24). Updated by Tom McCoy (2015) and Katie Martin (2018).

³⁴ Matyiku, S. (2011), 'A-prefixing', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/a-prefixing>. Accessed on 2024 -02-24). Updated by Tom McCoy (2015) and Katie Martin (2018).

³⁵ Kendall, T., R. Fasold, C. Farrington, J. McLarty, J., S. Arnson, and B. Josler (2018). *The Corpus of Regional African American Language: DCA (Washington DC 1968)*. Version 2018.10.06. Eugene, OR: The Online Resources for African American Language Project. <http://oraal.uoregon.edu/coraal>.

³⁶ Slightly adapted from Kaplan, A. (2015), 'Come with', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/come-with>. Accessed on 2024-03-22). Updated by Tom McCoy (2015) and Katie Martin (2018).

³⁷ Wood, J. (2013), 'The Alls construction', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/alls-construction>. Accessed on 2021-2-19). Updated by Tom McCoy (2015), Katie Martin (2018), and Oliver Shoulson (2020).

9. Here's me a good pair of jeans.³⁸ (Kentucky English/SAE)
10. He yelled at John for fixin' to change the plan.³⁹ (SAE/AAE)
11. You stay in your office too late anymore.⁴⁰ (ME)
12. She bin at work.⁴¹ (AAE)
13. She was right on time. (sE)

Supplemental Exercise 4 – Functions of {PPs}

Decide if the italicized PPs are postmodifiers (PM) or adverbials (A).⁴² We have separated two consecutive phrases with brackets

- a) *During the summer*, Sarah enjoys hikes *in the mountains* to escape the city's heat. (sE)
- b) Taylor often relaxes [*by taking a stroll*] [*at sunset*]. (sE)
- c) The house *by the lake* provides a serene retreat. (sE)
- d) The book *on the shelf* caught her attention *with its intriguing title*. (sE)
- e) *Despite the rain*, the team continued their practice *in the outdoor field* to prepare for the upcoming tournament. (sE)
- f) *With determination and focus*, Amos studied diligently *for their upcoming exams*. (sE)

³⁸ Wood, J. (2015.) 'Dative presentatives', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/dative-presentatives>. Accessed on 2023-09-21). Updated by Katie Martin (2018), Jim Wood (2019).

³⁹ Staub, P. and J. Zentz (2017), 'Fixin' To', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/fixin-to>. Accessed on 2024-03-07). Updated by Katie Martin (2018).

⁴⁰ Maher, Z., and T. McCoy (2011), 'Positive anymore', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/positive-anymore>. Accessed on 2024-02-23). Updated by Katie Martin (2018).

⁴¹ Harris, A., and J. Wood (2013), 'Stressed BIN', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/stressed-bin>. Accessed on 2023-09-21). Updated by Tom McCoy (2015) and Katie Martin (2018).

⁴² Based on an sentences produced by OpenAI, 2024.