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Locative-temporal axis overlapping: the case of prepositions

This article deals with semantic, functional and distributional characteristics of prepositions on, in and at.

prepositions, meaning, function, distribution

The distinctive property of the lexical-grammatical class of prepositions is conferring of a secondary focal prominence. This landmark is expressed by the prepositional objects, e.g. in winter [3, p.111 - 115]. Normally the same prepositions has both uses [1], adjectival, the last month in winter (where its trajectory is a thing), and also adverbial uses, They got married in winter where its trajectory is a relationship). This overlap seems to hint that the lexical-grammatical categorization is far from being trusted. Unless verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions can be grouped together as relation words.

The present article is focused on the three place prepositions on, in, at in comparison on the level of meaning, function, and distribution.

The object of the present investigation is the prepositions of place: ON - IN - AT selected from the British National Corpus.

The preposition on. The definitional analysis based on the Cobuild dictionary entry reveals the following constituents:

1. in contact or connection with the surface of; at the upper surface of, e.g.: an apple on the ground; a mark on the table cloth;
2. attached to, e.g.: a puppet on a string;
3. carried with, e.g.: I've no money on me;
4. in the immediate vicinity of, close to or along the side of, e.g.: a house on the sea, this verges on the ridiculous;
5. within the time limits of a day or date, e.g.: he arrived on Thursday;

6. being performed upon or relayed through the medium of, e.g.: what's on the television?;
 7. at the occasion of, e.g.: on his retirement;
 8. used to indicate support, subsistence, contingency, etc., e.g.: he lives on bread; it depends on what you want;
 9. regularly taking (a drug), e.g.: she's on the pill; addicted to, e.g.: he's on heroin;
 10. by means of (something considered as a mode of transport), esp. in such phrases as on foot, on wheels, on horseback, etc.;
 11. in the process or course of, e.g.: on a journey, on strike;
 12. concerned with or relating to, e.g.: a tax on potatoes, a programme on archaeology;
 13. used to indicate the basis, grounds, or cause, as of a statement or action, e.g.: I have it on good authority;
 14. against: used to indicate opposition, e.g.: they marched on the city at dawn;
 15. used to indicate a meeting or encounter, e.g.: he crept up on her;
 16. used with an adjective preceded by the indicating the manner or way in which an action is carried out, e.g.: on the sly, on the cheap;
 17. (informal) staked or wagered as a bet, e.g.: ten pounds on that horse; charged to, e.g.: the drinks are on me;
 18. usually followed by it (Australian), e.g.: drinking alcoholic liquor;
 19. (informal or dialect) to the loss or disadvantage of, e.g.: the old car gave out on us
- [2]. Constituents 1, 2, 4 are direct markers of locative relationship of objects.

The frequency of on is 734285 in the British National Corpus the volume of which is 100 mln word forms, e.g.: 1. I immediately guessed something was wrong-he always put his answering machine on if he didn't want to talk.

2. Later, sitting in the Lagonda with one hand on the steering wheel, Mungo tried to recall what he knew about the dead girl, apart from her name.

3. And Palin won, arriving back on the eve of his eightieth day, and finding the Reform Club, his starting point, closed to him - or at least to his cameras-and London in the grip of last Christmas's shopping rush.

4. It's obviously their job to keep tabs on the financial situation and

my job to provide entertaining football on the pitch and win promotion

5. Roque Fernandez was named as the new President of the Central Bank, replacing Javier Gonzalez Fraga who had resigned on Jan. 28 when the austral dropped dramatically against the US dollar.

6. The mobsters forced motorists from Mercedes, Porsches and BMWs at gunpoint in petrol stations, car parks and on streets throughout the city and its tree-lined suburbs.

7. When large quantities of oil are released after the break-up of a tanker, for example, sea birds appear to be more visibly affected than the smooth-skinned dolphins, possibly because cetaceans can choose to swim away from oil slicks, and do not have to keep returning through slicks to nesting sites on shore.

Text fragments 2, 4, 6, 7 prove the locative meaning of the preposition on.

The functions of on; We use on for a surface: on the wall - on the ceiling - on the floor - on a page, on a cover. Have you seen the notice on the notice board? 1. We use on with **small islands**: 2. We say that a place is **on the coast / on a river / on a road**: She spent her holiday on a small island. London is on the river Thames. Portsmouth is on the south coast of England. The phrasal on:

on a farm - on the left - on the right - on the ground floor - on the first, second, ... floor - on the way - on the chair (sit) - on the radio - on television - on a horse - on the corner of a street - on the back / front of a letter / piece of paper etc.

The preposition in. The definitional analysis based on the Cobuild dictionary entry reveals the following constituents:

1. inside; within, e.g.: no smoking in the auditorium;
2. at a place where there is, e.g.: lying in the shade, walking in the rain;
3. indicating a state, situation, or condition, e.g.: in a deep sleep, standing in silence;
4. before or when (a period of time) has elapsed, e.g.: come back in one year;
5. using (a language, etc) as a means of communication, e.g.: written in code;
6. concerned or involved with, esp as an occupation in journalism;
7. expressing a ratio, proportion, or probability, e.g.: one in five boys;
8. while or by performing the action of; as a consequence of or by

means of, e.g.: in crossing; the street he was run over;

9. used to indicate goal or purpose, e.g.: in honour of the president;

10. (used of certain animals) about to give birth to; pregnant with (specified offspring), e.g.: in foal, in calf;

11. a variant of into, e.g.: she fell in the water, he tore the paper in two [2];
Constituents 1,2, 11 are direct markers of the locative relationship of objects.

The frequency of in: is 1944328 in the British National Corpus the volume of which is 100 mln word forms, eg.: 1. 'Am I in London?' she asked clearly and briskly.

2. In a research project I carried out into academic publishing a great deal of the work required me to interview very experienced and knowledgeable publishers and to ask questions which, inevitably, touched on financial matters.

3. Some hospital trusts in the inner cities may be shedding staff, but others in the suburbs and the shires are recruiting new staff and cutting waiting-lists.

4. In the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the two areas most immediately affected, this had been the subject of heated debate.

5. Structural power in these networks affects access to information, to resources, to decision-making and to cooperation.

6. He'd probably laugh in my kind face.

7. When Crawford returned to television, it was in a straight role very different from Frank Spencer. Text fragments 1, 3, 4 prove the locative meaning-of the preposition in.

The function of in: We use in for an enclosed space: in the garden - in the house - in London - in the water in her bag - in a row - in a town. There is nobody in the room. She lives in a small village. 1. We say in when we talk about a building itself. 2. We usually say in with towns and villages: The rooms of Tom 's house are small His parents live in York.

The phrasal in:

in the newspaper - in bed - in hospital - in prison - in the street - in the sky - in an armchair (sit) - in a photograph - in a picture - in a mirror - in the corner of a room - in the back / front of a car - arrive in a country or town

The preposition *at*. The definitional analysis based on the Cobuild dictionary entry reveals the following constituents:

1. used to indicate location or position, e.g.: are they at the table?, staying at a small hotel;
2. towards; in the direction of, e.g.: looking at television; throwing stones at windows;
3. used to indicate position in time, e.g.: come at three o'clock;
4. engaged in; in a state of (being), e.g.: children at play, stand at ease; he is at his most charming today;
5. (in expressions concerned with habitual activity) during the passing of (esp in the phrase *at night*), e.g.: he used to work at night;
6. for; in exchange for, e.g.: it's selling at four pounds;
7. used to indicate the object of an emotion, e.g.: angry at the driver, shocked at his behaviour;
8. see where it's at.

Constituents 1, 2 are direct markers of the locative relationship of objects.

The frequency is 526764 in the British National Corpus the volume of which is 100 mln word forms, eg.:

1, Elsewhere small flocks usually winter along the coast between Goring and Worthing and at Rye Harbour, but totals do not often exceed about 50 birds.

2, No, even though their parties don't officially start until 7.30 p. m., and actually until well after 9.00pm, all oorays turn up at parties in their work clothes.

3, Andy is at my side but then ducks away into the throng.

4, Oh there's only Scott at school?

5, At Evening Prayer Charles was described as among 'the greatest of Kings and best of men'.

6, Many of the French laughed at such antics, or felt disgusted at being allied with so 'primitive' a people.

7, Each sector director looks at his business on a national level.

Text fragments 1, 3, 4 prove the locative meaning of the preposition *at*.

The function of *at*: 1. We say that someone is at an event. ; 2. We say at within buildings when we say where the event (film, concert, ...) takes place:

at a party - at a pop concert - at a conference - at a meeting, e.g.: Where were you yesterday? At the cinema. Tom is at a party. The meeting took place at the headquarters. 3. We say, e.g.: at someone's house. 4. We say at for a place, e.g.: which is a part of our journey.

We were at Bill's house last Thursday. We stopped at a very nice village. Does the train stop at Nashville? We use at for a point: at the window - at the entrance - at the door, at the end of the street — at the station - at the top on a cover, e.g.: Bill is waiting for you at the bus stop.

Phrasal at: at home - at work — at school — at university — at college — at the station — at an airport - at the seaside - at sea (on a voyage) - at reception - at the corner of a street - at the back /front of a building / cinema /group of people, etc. - arrive at with other places or events.

The prepositions under research can overlap on two axis, on the locative axis: on - 1, 2, 4; in - 1, 2, 11; at - 1, 2; and on the temporal axis: on - 5; in - 4; at - 3, 5. The locative constituents form the nucleus of the three prepositions semantics, while the temporal constituents form 1 -2 peripheries of their semantic structure. The rest of the constituents need their further integral analysis.

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