

Paper title: Metaphorical prepositions in L2 English

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#### ABSTRACT:

This paper investigates preposition use in written and spoken language of advanced Norwegian learners of English, to provide empirical evidence concerning the nature of the ‘problem’ with prepositions – typically considered “a traditional and recurring nightmare for all learners of English” (Littlemore & Low 2006, p. 285). The following research questions are answered:

- 1) How often do these learners produce divergent prepositions (i.e., prepositions whose contextual senses are not codified in standard English dictionaries)?
- 2) Is there a significant difference between metaphorical use of prepositions across the oral and written modes in L2 learner English?
- 3) Is there a correlation between divergent use and metaphorical use?

The data for this investigation consists of all prepositions employed in roughly 20,000 words of argumentative texts retrieved from the Norwegian component of the International Corpus of Learner English, together with all prepositions uttered by fifty L2 English students in approximately 13 hours of recorded and transcribed conversation from the Norwegian subcorpus of the Louvain International Database of Spoken English Interlanguage. Informants for both corpora are Norwegian college students characterized as higher-intermediate to advanced learners of English (Gilquin et al. 2010; Granger et al. 2009).

All prepositions were first classified by metaphorical status using the Metaphorical Identification Procedure, calling for comparison of their contextual and basic (most concrete) senses (see e.g. Steen et al. 2010). In addition, all contextually divergent prepositions in the material were identified, indicating the frequency with which these learners produce divergent prepositions in both spoken and written language. Previous studies based on the same data indicate a 44% correlation between divergent use and possible L1 transfer in both written and spoken modes (Nacey 2013a, pp. 205-240; 2013b; Nacey & Graedler 2013; submitted). The present investigation provides evidence about the extent to which metaphor might also play a role with respect to learner difficulties, by considering whether challenges increase as the contextual meaning shifts away from a core, concrete meaning to a more peripheral, metaphorical meaning.

This paper follows on the heels of recent research about adapting the cognitive view of metaphor as a pedagogical tool through showing how metaphorical senses are related to the core senses of prepositions in a principled manner, replacing conventional wisdom that there is no rhyme nor reason for why one preposition is preferred over another in a given context (see e.g. Lindstromberg 1998; Tyler & Evans 2003). What this investigation adds is empirical evidence from one group of L2 English learners concerning the real magnitude of the challenge preposition use presents, and the true extent of the role of metaphor in preposition use.

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