

What can oral learner corpora reveal about preposition use?

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Prepositions are difficult



Overview of presentation

- Material
- Specific research questions
- Procedure
- Findings
- Concluding remarks

Material

- Norwegian component of the Louvain International Database of Spoken English Interlanguage (LINDSEI)
- 15-minute 'interviews'
- 50 informants
 - Year-long tertiary level course in English
 - Upper intermediate - advanced proficiency
- Approx. 83,000 words transcribed text

Research questions

1. How often do these learners produce an inappropriate preposition?
2. Is there a correlation between inappropriate use and L1 influence?
3. Is there a significant difference between Norwegian learners' preposition use in oral and written language?

Procedure: Identification

- **Phrasal verbs**

*they're all **handed in** at roughly the same time (NO026)*

- **Polywords**

*= (eh) you're **in charge of** it (NO006)*

- **Titles**

*we're actually putting up <begin laughter> Alice **in** Wonderland (NO016)*

Procedure: Identification

- **Phrasal verbs**

*they're all **handed in** at roughly the same time (NO026)*

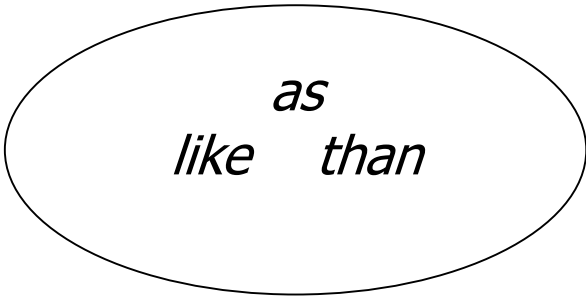
- **Polywords**

*= (eh) you're **in charge** of it (NO006)*

- **Titles**

*we're actually putting up <begin laughter> Alice **in** Wonderland (NO016)*

What **is** a preposition?



as
like *than*

Procedure: Identification

- Phrasal verbs

*they're all **handed in** at roughly the same time (NO026)*

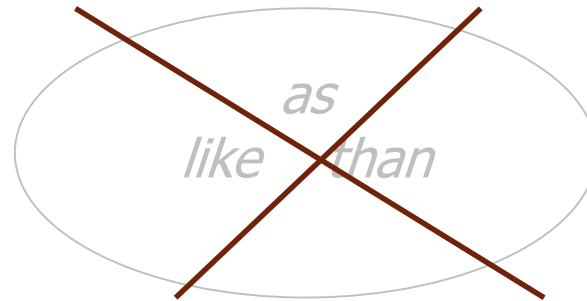
- Polywords

*= (eh) you're **in charge** of it (NO006)*



- Titles

*we're actually putting up <begin laughter> Alice **in** Wonderland (NO016)*

What **is** a preposition?



Procedure: Categorization of contextual appropriacy

-  *I got some relatives (em) **in** New Jersey and **in** Salt Lake City as well (NO046)*
-  *and then (eh) there is competition **in** this level (NO006)*
- **'Other'**: *I'm ver= more (eh) much more f= fascinated of e= England **in the way** (NO022)*
- **'Don't know'**: *so I went there and: . I really liked it so **after** the= and it was only for three months a half semester (NO014)*

Procedure: Categorization of congruence

- Congruent
 - Both L1 and L2 require a preposition
 - Neither L1 nor L2 require a preposition
- Non-congruent
 - Only one of languages requires a preposition

Overall preposition frequency

LINDSEI (83,313)

	Preposition	Frequency
1	in	1301
2	of	877
3	to	615
4	for	470
5	with	428
6	on	325
7	at	300
8	from	253
9	about	206
10	by	75
11	after	53
12	around	43
13	into	43
14	through	21

- 5,171 prepositions
- 1 out of 16 words
- 53 different prepositions
- 'Top 14' = 98.7%
- *in* = 21.1%

How often do these learners produce an inappropriate preposition?

LINDSEI (83,313)

5,171 prepositions



4,953

- 95.8% of all prepositions
- 5.9% of word total



218

- 4.2% of all prepositions
- 0.3% of word total

Is there a correlation between inappropriate use and L1 influence?

- Congruent
 - Both L1 and L2 require a preposition
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Non-congruent pattern (9.6%)

Subtype	LINDSEI example	Norw. transl.	Alternative Eng. prep.
L1 prep	<i>for a year ago I wouldn't be able to do it</i> (NO006)	for	∅
L2 prep	<i>I was in the staff so .. (eh)</i> (NO050)	∅	on

Congruent pattern (90.4%)

Subtype	LINDSEI example	Norw. transl.	Alternative Eng. prep.
Basic	<i>it's in (eh) . among the industrial area where there's many high houses (NO012)</i>	i	in
Divergent	<i>she doesn't look very happy at the painting (NO013)</i>	på	in
	<i>the whole (eh) the lines they make outside of bakeries (NO022)</i>	Ø	Ø

60.1%



Divergent congruence subtypes

Divergent pattern	LINDSEI example	Norw. transl.	Alternative Eng. prep.
Preposition triad (37.4%)	<i>I was (eh) going to take my horse . and have it by my uncle's (NO041)</i>	hos	at
L1 transfer (62.6%)	<i>for me it looked like they m= they liked it .. enjoyed it (NO020)</i>	for	to

L1 transfer?

- Congruent (Type: divergent/L1 transfer) = 82
- Non-congruent (Type: L1 prep) = 14

In sum 96 cases...

44% of all inappropriate prepositions = potential L1 transfer


Is there a significant difference between Norwegian learners' preposition use in oral and written language?

LINDSEI (83,313)

5,171 prepositions

 4,953

- 95.8% of all prepositions
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NICLE (20,466)

1,728 prepositions

 1,649

- 95.4% of all prepositions
- 8.1% of word total

 79

- 4.6% of all prepositions
- 0.4% of word total

Summing up...

How often do these learners produce an inappropriate preposition?



96%



4%

Is there a correlation between inappropriate use and L1 influence?

YES

Is there a significant difference between Norwegian learner's preposition use in oral and written language?

NO

Widening the scope...

- L1 transfer plays more of a role with certain prepositions
e.g. (for Norwegian) *on/på*
- L1 transfer does not account for all errors

Further areas of research:

- Different L1s
- Different proficiency levels within the same L1

Selected references

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- Nacey, S. (forthcoming). *Metaphors in learner English*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.