What can oral learner corpora reveal about preposition use?

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Prepositions are difficult

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Overview of presentation

- Material

- Specific research questions

- Procedure

- Findings

- Concluding remarks

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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

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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?

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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**

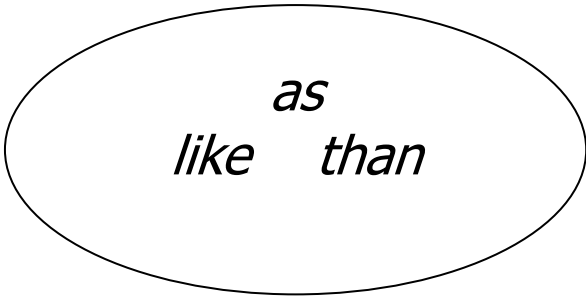   *they're all **handed in** at roughly the same time* (NO026)

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What *is* a preposition?

as
like   than

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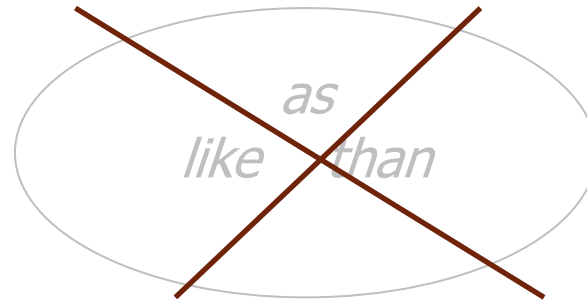
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Procedure: Categorization of contextual appropriacy

- *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)

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Procedure: Categorization of congruence

- Congruent
  - Both L1 and L2 require a preposition
  - Neither L1 nor L2 require a preposition

- Non-conguent
  - Only one of languages requires a preposition

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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%

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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

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Is there a correlation between inappropriate use and L1 influence?

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Non-congruent pattern (9.6%)

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

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Congruent pattern (90.4%)

Subtype	LINDSEI example	Norw. transl.	Alternative Eng. prep.
Basic	*it's in (eh) .* **among** *the industrial area where there's many high houses* (NO012)	i	in
Divergent	*she doesn't look very happy* **at** *the painting* (NO013)	på	in
60.1%	*the whole (eh) the lines they make outside* **of** *bakeries* (NO022)	Ø	Ø

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Divergent congruence subtypes

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

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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
- 5.9% of word total

218
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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

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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

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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

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Selected references

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