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Volume 74

Adpositions. Pragmatic, semantic and syntactic perspectives
Edited by Dennis Kurzon and Silvia Adler
To the memory of Susanne Feigenbaum (1945–2004)
# Table of contents

**Introduction**  
*Dennis Kurzon and Silvia Adler*  
1

**The contributors**  
13

**French compound prepositions, prepositional locutions and prepositional phrases in the scope of the absolute use**  
Silvia Adler  
17

“Over the hills and far away” or “far away over the hills”; English place adverb phrases and place prepositional phrases in tandem?  
David J. Allerton  
37

**Structures with omitted prepositions: Semantic and pragmatic motivations**  
Esther Borochovsky Bar Aba  
67

A closer look at the Hebrew construct and free locative PPs:  
The analysis of *mi*-locatives  
Irena Botwinik-Rotem  
85

**Pragmatics of prepositions: A study of the French connectives *pour le coup* and *du coup***  
Pierre Cadiot and Franck Lebas  
115

**Particles and postpositions in Korean**  
Injoo Choi-Jonin  
133

French prepositions *à* and *de* in infinitival complements:  
A pragma-semantic analysis  
Lidia Fraczak  
171

**Prepositional wars: When ideology defines preposition**  
Julia G. Krivoruchko  
191

“*Ago*” and its grammatical status in English and other languages  
Dennis Kurzon  
209
Case marking of Turkic adpositional objects

*Alan Reed Libert*

The logic of addition: Changes in the meaning of the Hebrew preposition ‘im (“with”)  

*Tamar Sovran*

A monosemic view of polysemic prepositions

*Yishai Tobin*

The development of classical Armenian prepositions and its implications for universals of language change

*Christopher Wilhelm*

Author index

Languages index

Subject index
Introduction

Dennis Kurzon and Silvia Adler

1. In June 2000, an international conference on prepositions was held at the University of Haifa. Speakers came from France, Britain, the United States, as well as from Israel. One of the results of this conference was the book *Prepositions in their Syntactic, Semantic and Pragmatic Context*, edited by Dennis Kurzon and the late Susanne Feigenbaum, of the English Department and the French Department, respectively, of Haifa University, and published by John Benjamins of Amsterdam (Feigenbaum and Kurzon 2002). Some of the papers addressed theoretical problems concerning prepositions, while others dealt with issues with regard to specific problems of prepositions in various languages (especially English, French and Hebrew). Judging from the immediate response of the original contributors – as well as the response from other scholars – as to the possibility of further exploring this word-class, we may say that, four years later, nobody has yet said his or her last word on the subject.

We have, therefore, decided that it is time to continue the research into this small but central word class in many of the world’s languages. In order to broaden the perspectives, in this book we refer to the word-class not as prepositions, which seems to show a somewhat Eurocentric and Semitic perspective, but adpositions, a term which covers prepositions, postpositions (e.g. Turkic and Indian languages), and other phenomena such as circumpositions (e.g. Amharic). We turned to the contributors of the first volume and to others who have shown interest in adpositions in recent years. The net result is the following book, a collection of articles that deal again with adpositions in a variety of languages, and from different perspectives. Apart from English, French and Hebrew, we have papers dealing with adpositions in Russian, Korean, Turkic languages and Armenian. The scholars who have contributed to this project come from around the world, just as in the first volume: as well as Israel and France, Australia, Korea, Switzerland and the USA are all represented.
2. Since the treatment of adpositions, as a broader class, raises so many questions and debates, one need not wonder why this category keeps interesting researchers:

- questions of definition and categorization;
- questions concerning the relation of the adposition with the left-side or the right-side context;
- questions concerning its morphology, syntax or semantics;
- questions regarding the choice of adpositions;
- questions dealing with the integration of adpositions within a larger category of functors;
- questions concerning the status of adpositions in cases of anaphorization of their complement by a null pronoun;
- questions of grammaticalization.

There are so many open questions, and that in addition to the different approaches, as to the best way to describe this word-class: see, for instance the psycho-mechanic model (Guillaume 1964; Picoche 1986; Pottier 1962, 1997), the dynamic and interactive framework (gestalt perspectives) (Culioli 1990; Cadiot 1999; Cadiot and Visetti 2001; Flageul 1997; Victorri and Fuchs 1996; Visetti and Cadiot 2000), or the cognitive theories (Groussier 1997; Langacker 1987, 1999; Talmy 2000; Traugott 1980) dealing with the semantics of adpositions, especially attempts at resolving the problem of polysemy.

In recent years, many books and articles have been written on the subject, thus adding cement and bricks to the corner stones: not only do we have Feigenbaum and Kurzon (2002), mentioned in 1. above, but also Coventry and Garrod (2004), Hoffmann (2005), Iliniski (2003), Kupferman (2004), Melis (2003), Tiivel (2001), Tyler and Evans (2003), to mention just a few. We hope the present contribution will help towards the understanding of additional perspectives relating to this intriguing subject and reveal new data from many languages.

Adpositions are usually defined as invariable elements, preceding or following a complement of a nominal nature and relating it to another element of the sentence. But an elementary definition such as this one, which purposively leaves out the semantic component, may not present a full account of the picture. According to Hagège (1997:6–7), for instance, the French signifier de may assume two different functions: that of “relateur” (element of relation) and that of “joncteur” (element of junction). The first subordinates a nominal element to a predicate (as in mourir de froid), and the second is internal to the NP (le jardin de mon père). But what can we say about de in la ville de Paris (“the city of Paris”) in which de is denied any content and lacks a subordinating role? Thus, in order
to encompass the variety of contexts in which adpositions may appear, several authors propose to avoid the problem of function by describing adpositions as “indicateurs d’argument” (Gaston Gross 1996:123–125), or “marqueurs de fonction” (Riegel et al. 1994:106).

Adpositions are said to be transitive by nature (Allerton 1975; Blinkenberg 1960; Brunot 1965; Cadiot 1997; Gaatone 1976; Le Querler 1994; Pottier 1962; Ruwet 1982; Sechehaye 1950), but by a slight manipulation the adposition may be deprived of its complement, for example, in the case of pronominalization by ellipsis, or in the case of English prepositional verbs in certain structures. This immediately raises the question of the status of the adposition and its possible adverbialization (Cervoni 1991; Cressot 1950; Dubois 1965; Huddleston and Pullum 2002; Le Goffic 1993; Piot 1988; Tallerman 1998).

Those who include in their definition of “adposition” the issue of the relation between a left-side context and a right-side context (a relation that has to be materialized by the adposition itself) face a new kind of problem: is the adposition attached to these two contexts to the same extent or does it establish a more intimate relation with one of the contexts? According to Cervoni (1991) and Riegel et al. (1994), the adposition has a more intimate relation with the complement, i.e. in the case of prepositions with the right-side context. This is also the opinion of Cadiot (1997:19), for whom the description of the relation should not be [(A – PREP – B)], but rather [A – (PREPB)]. One of the reasons motivating this description is the fact that a preposition may not have a left-side context at all (Cadiot 1997:30), e.g. Pour moi, il n’a rien compris (“As for myself / according to me / he didn’t understand a thing”).

As has been pointed out above, numerous definitions of adpositions usually mention the fact that these items are invariable (Marouzeau 1969; Dubois et al. 1994; Mounin 1974). This is not the case in Semitic languages, in which prepositions morphologically vary when the complement is a personal pronoun, e.g. Arabic li “to” → lahu “to him/it”, lanâ “to us’. Even in Indo-European languages this elementary feature of invariability may be problematic: the form of certain adpositions may change according to the complement (see, for instance, the case of the French preposition étant donné “considering, given”). Moreover, the class of simple adpositions is usually said to be a closed one in the sense that there is no innovation, contrary to other word-classes (except for conjunctions, determiners and pronouns) and contrary to the subclass of compound adpositions. But even this is subject to discussion, for in French, for instance, there are “modern prepositions” derived from nouns (côté, question, niveau, genre).

As for the complement of an adposition, it is said to be of a non-propositional nature. One recognizes that the difference between subordinating conjunctions
and adpositions relies on the nature of the complement. Only the first can subordinate a content clause with a finite verb. But what about the following English, French and Hebrew equivalents in which the complement of the preposition (in italics) is a subordinate clause (in bold)?

Eng: souvenirs from when we were young  
Fr: les souvenirs de quand on était petits  
Heb: zixronot mi-matai še hainu ktanim

Eng: we are attracted by who tells us the truth  
Fr: nous sommes attirés par qui nous dit la vérité  
Heb: anaxnu nimšaxim al jidei mi še omer lanu et haemet

To further account for the problematic nature of this word-class, let us, as a final example, raise the question of its semantics. On the one hand, we have authors who categorize this word-class among grammatical elements, to distinguish it from lexical ones (Martinet 1960; Piot 1988), thus suggesting the basic nature of the meaning of adpositions, or even the fact that in some contexts they are empty of meaning (Kurzon 2002). On the other hand, we face the problem of the highly polysemic nature of adpositions (Cadiot 1997; Cervoni 1991; Leeman 1997), which means that this word-class has meaning after all. We may also relate to the discourse-oriented studies which maintain that the frame for the analysis of adpositions and PPs (AdPs) goes beyond the narrow unit of the sentence. Finally, another issue closely related to the semantics of adpositions would be the question of their grammaticalization, i.e. the process in which the lexical power of an item gradually becomes reduced until it finally becomes a grammatical form. Some of these aspects will be developed in the present volume.

3. The articles in this collection cover syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of adpositions. They may be grouped in a number of ways. In this introduction, we have adopted a conceptually based order which, we hope, will help the reader to find his or her way. Another division could be on the basis of the language investigated – French, Hebrew, etc., but this would not make clear the overlapping concerns of many of the articles despite the different languages being addressed. As to the order of appearance of each of the articles in this collection, we have decided to publish them in alphabetical order.

Pierre Cadiot and Franck Lebas deal with the pragmatics of French prepositions, arguing that the study of prepositions would remain partial if only grammatical and semantic issues were examined. A full description of prepositions should also expose their pragmatic potential, a theory which they apply to two connective set locutions: du coup and pour le coup. More precisely, the authors claim that the French complex connective pour le coup – translated as a blend
of “at the time” and “as a result” – can be analyzed into a complex structure of *pour*, *le* and *coup*, which does not allow a too specialized view of prepositions, articles and nouns, respectively. When compared to *du coup* – made up of the preposition *de*, and translated as “and so” – the contribution of *pour* to the complex preposition appears to be mainly pragmatic. Their study endorses a gestaltist compositionality principle, according to which the noun *coup* can never be identified with its psychologically prototypical value and will be taken as a “scheme”, a “motive”, or some kind of anticipation. The function of the preposition *pour* in *pour le coup* is associated, in this respect, with pure discourse management, and will thus become a sort of index (an instruction to go to the next line or to the next paragraph). Cadiot and Lebas conclude that *pour le coup* focuses exclusively on discursive strategy and is a type of perlocutionary act, while the pragmatic mechanism established by *du coup* is illocutionary.

Inspired by the theories of Cervoni (1991), Cadiot (1997) and Lebas (1999), **Lidia Fraczak** also formulates a pragmatic hypothesis concerning two other French prepositions: *à* and *de*. As opposed to current theories claiming that these two prepositions are devoid of any meaning when they are lexically selected by the predicate, such as in *hésiter à faire* and *envisager de faire*, Fraczak claims that the use of these prepositions reflect, to a certain extent, the communicative intention of the speaker or, in other words, these prepositions fill a pragmatic function. Fraczak attributes to the preposition *à* a “marked” status: this preposition appears when the speaker’s intention is to introduce a “not taking for granted” presentation of the event, or a point of view according to which the event is somehow “problematic”. The value of the preposition *de*, on the contrary, implies an “unproblematic” view of the fact, without, however, meaning that the fact is necessarily “taken for granted” or presupposed.

Further data on French prepositions is provided by **Silvia Adler**’s article, which looks at sequences sharing the morphosyntactic pattern [PREP – DEF ART – N – PREP] and the possible activation of the absolute use, i.e. a prepositional sequence without complement. Her paper has a twofold purpose: first, it establishes a categorization method allowing a clear-cut border to be drawn among the different prepositional expressions (compound prepositions, prepositional locutions, prepositional phrases), which enables the absolute use of each kind of category to be correlated to another strategy of economy (such as ellipsis or the associative anaphora). The second stage examines why, regardless of their lexical status, mainly temporal and spatial prepositional expressions naturally accept the absolute use, in contrast to prepositional expressions denoting cause, consequence, goal, comparison, opposition, concession, etc. This leads to a discussion of the inherent properties of the definite article included within this matrix, and its influence on the possible activation of the absolute use.
Irena Botwinik-Rotem also raises the question of the absolute use, the preposition without complement, this time of Hebrew prepositions. She argues that only prepositions prefixed with *mi-* can appear without a phonetically realized complement because Hebrew locatives enter two syntactic frames: (i) preposition DP and (ii) preposition *le-*DP. According to Botwinik-Rotem, Hebrew prepositions, by and large, are construct heads, and therefore frame (i) is an instance of the prepositional construct state. In contrast, frame (ii) is argued to be an instance of the free state PP which is much less pervasive than frame (i), because it can arise only with prepositions prefixed with *mi-*., rendering these prepositions complex, phonologically heavy, heads, precluding their construct nature.

Similar to Fraczak’s article on French à and de, Yishai Tobin also deals with two Hebrew elementary prepositions: *l-* and *b-* and, again, similar to Fraczak, Tobin holds that the smaller a form, the more frequently it will be used, and the more meanings and functions will be attributed to it. After examining popular Hebrew-English dictionaries, which indicate that these Hebrew prepositions are highly polysemic in that they have at least fifteen glosses each, and after showing that some of these dictionary meanings overlap, Tobin proposes to view both prepositions as linguistic signs (in the Saussurean sense) presenting a monosemic analysis, i.e. a single invariant or core meaning for each, which will account for all of its messages and uses as well as explain the differences between them.

The work of two more scholars on Hebrew prepositions appears in the present book. Tamar Sovran’s contribution deals with changes in the use of the preposition *im* (“with”) in written Modern Hebrew. Unlike previous theories, which claimed that most of these changes reflect the multilingual situation in Israel, Sovran argues that there are additional motivations which are rooted in cognitive processes and in the logic of adding and connecting. Sovran’s position is that this phenomenon is not just a mere change in meaning and use, but rather implies directions of syntactical reorganization of sentence patterns, and tracing these changes is a step towards portraying the typological uniqueness of Modern Israeli Hebrew.

Esther Borochovsky Bar-Aba’s article compares two parallel syntactic structures in Modern Hebrew: one with a preposition “mediating” between the verb and its complement and the other without a preposition, or with the direct object marker ‘*et*, and explores whether, in cases where the addressee uses the structure without the preposition, there exists, too, a structure with a preposition, or whether s/he creates a structure without a preposition. Borochovsky Bar-Aba focuses on the various semantic and pragmatic motivations for preferring the structure without the preposition – a structure which has become popular in Modern Hebrew, especially in the spoken language and in advertisements – such as the possibility of offering a holistic view instead of a partitive one, which would be expressed by the structure with the mediating preposition.
Two of the chapters in the present book deal with the issue of case marking. **Alan Libert**, who places his study in a cross-linguistic context, explores the complex case-marking behavior of adpositions in several Turkic languages, the vast majority of which are postpositions governing objects in the nominative, genitive, dative, or ablative case, and a small number assign either nominative or genitive, depending on particular properties of the object. According to his thesis, the history of the individual postposition plays a major role in the determination of the case(s) it assigns.

**Christopher Wilhelm** traces the development in the history of the Armenian language of the proclitic preposition *z-* (“concerning”, “around”), which may also function as a semantically empty marker of a definite direct object in the accusative case, and which is found marking agreement of a noun and its modifying adjective as well, thus serving an additional function of a case-marking morpheme. Wilhelm further shows that this phenomenon is not limited to one item, for a prefixed locative *y-* also occurs. Like Libert’s, Wilhelm’s study is cross-linguistic, and his broader overall pattern includes evidence from other Indo-European languages, and from some Northern Australian languages which also have prefixes carrying out a case-marking function.

Similar to Tamar Sovran and Esther Borochovsky Bar-Aba, **Julia Krivoruchko** is concerned with matters of parallel constructions in contemporary language, but this time in Russian. Through the analysis of Russian constructions such as *na ukraine* vs. *v ukraine*, both meaning “in Ukraine”, and *iz ukrainy* vs. *s ukrainy* “from Ukraine”, as well of their Ukrainian counterparts, Krivoruchko portrays the Russian-Ukrainian prepositional conflict: while the pre-perestroika Russian favored the normative construction with the preposition *na*, the supporters of Ukrainian independence promoted the alternative use with *v*. In Ukraine, the new construction became standard in the official state language (Ukrainian) and in a short time extended to the Russian-language mass media of the country. In Russia, fierce discussions about the newly emerged “politically correct” usage followed, and they still continue, but meanwhile, important “victories” were achieved including the penetration of the innovation (*v Ukraine*) into Russian state documents of primary importance.

Complex postpositions in Korean are examined by **Injoo Choi Jonin**. A large number of Korean postpositions have developed from verbs of motion and nouns, through variable degrees of grammaticalization. Choi Jonin questions previous theories claiming that the degree of grammaticalization may be established by the omissibility of the particle, i.e. if a complex postposition formed with a grammaticalized verb or noun and a particle can be used without the particle, it is considered more grammaticalized than one which cannot. Furthermore, the omissibility of the particle in the structure of complex postposition relies on its
morphosyntactic status (suffix-like or postposition-like) rather than on the degree of grammaticalization of complex postpositions. Besides revaluing the correlation between the omissibility of particles and the degree of grammaticalization of complex postpositions and proposing an alternative hypothesis concerning their grammaticalization, Choi Jonin defines the categorial status of Korean particles in order to isolate postposition-like particles, concluding that these are clitics which possess properties of both suffixes and of independent words capable of functioning as syntactic heads or as modifiers.

Finally, there are two contributions on spatio-temporal adpositions. David Allerton investigates the structure of English and German phrases like “far away over the hills” and “am Ufer entlang”, apparently including both a (modified) adverb and a preposition phrase, and raises the question of the appropriate analysis of such complex adverbial/adpositional phrases with a spatio-temporal adverbial function. In other words, Allerton proposes to find out whether phrases of this and similar kinds in English and German exhibit a dual-headed PP.

Dennis Kurzon analyses the syntax of the English temporal deictic expression ago, presenting two arguments, one in favour of classifying ago as the only postposition in English (or at least one of a very small number), and the second in which ago is considered an intransitive preposition. He then examines the classification of the equivalent item in a number of languages from around the world. Most of the languages investigated select an adposition, the other dominant word class being an adverb. Although languages in the Pacific region tend to use adverbial expressions, there are Indo-European languages that also select adverbials. Kurzon also relates to the overt and covert cases of temporal NPs that function as the complement of the relevant adposition.

References

Introduction

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**Further references**

Introduction


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Silvia Adler is a lecturer in French linguistics at the University of Haifa. She received her doctoral degree from Tel Aviv University in 2002 with a dissertation on ellipsis in prepositional environments. Her current research interests are ellipsis, lexicalization, prepositions, scalarity and prepositional quantifiers.

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Esther Borochovsky Bar-Aba is a senior lecturer, and currently head of the Hebrew language section in the Hebrew culture department at Tel Aviv University. Her research interests include syntax, semantics and pragmatics of Modern Hebrew, especially the argument structures of verbs, and the syntax of spoken Hebrew.

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Pierre Cadiot is professor of linguistics at the University of Orleans, and has published (mostly in French) articles and several books in semantics, especially cognitive semantics. His principal topics are prepositions, nominal polysemy, functional and gestaltist aspects of syntax.

Injoo Choi-Jonin is currently professor at the University of Toulouse-Le Mirail. Her primary research interests are in the fields of morphosyntax, semantics and pragmatics, focusing on verbal constructions in French and in Korean.
Lidia Fraczak teaches linguistics at the University of Clermont-Ferrand II. Her research focuses on the forms and structures of French language particularly problematic for non-native French learners and speakers: prepositions, articles, tenses, etc. Her approach is based on pragmatic considerations related to the speaker’s communicative and argumentative intentions, which are viewed as the main source of the choice of linguistic forms in an utterance.

Julia G. Krivoruchko is a researcher of Greek Bible in the Byzantine Judaism Project, in the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge. She is also affiliated with the University of Haifa. Her main publications deal with Greek historical linguistics and sociolinguistics (mainly dialectology and lexicography), as well as language contacts involving Greek, Slavic and Semitic languages.

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Franck Lebas teaches linguistics at the University of Clermont-Ferrand II. His research covers semantics, pragmatics and language philosophy. He contributes to the Indexicality of Meaning theory, whose aim is full compatibility between linguistic descriptions and the phenomenology of the French philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

Alan Libert has been working as lecturer since 1994 at the University of Newcastle (Australia). His recent book, Ambipositions, deals with adpositions which can precede or follow their complements. Some of his research is on case and adpositions in Turkic languages, and in Latin, Greek, and other Indo-European languages.

Tamar Sovran is a professor in the department of Hebrew Studies at Tel Aviv University, teaching semantics, stylistics, poetic language, and the revival of Modern Hebrew. She has published three books on aspects of semantics, and papers in linguistics and in philosophy of language on semantic field theory, theory of metaphor, and on various aspects of Modern Hebrew.

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Language; and a diachronic and syntactic study of the interface between form and meaning in ablaut in English nominal and verbal forms.

Christopher Wilhelm received his BA in Classics from Reed College, MA in Classics and Linguistics from the University of Kansas, and PhD in Indo-European Studies from UCLA. He is currently Chair of the Foreign Language Department and Instructor of Latin at Mayfield Senior School of Pasadena, California.
French compound prepositions, prepositional locutions and prepositional phrases in the scope of the absolute use

Silvia Adler
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In respect of their absolute use, without complement, French sequences sharing the pattern \([\text{Preposition} – \text{Definite article} – \text{Noun} – \text{Preposition}]\) have to be subcategorized by lexical and by semantic parameters. These sequences are frequently classified as “prepositional locutions” in the French linguistic literature, but it seems that this label is wrongly attached to many of them. Our goal is, first, to establish a categorization method whose purpose is to draw a border between the different prepositional expressions. This will allow us to dissociate their absolute use from their lexical status. However, once it is made clear that many of these alleged prepositional locutions are nothing more than regular prepositional phrases, the absolute use can no longer be unconditionally attributed to ellipsis. Second, we will examine why mainly temporal and spatial expressions accept the absolute use contrary to expressions denoting cause, goal, opposition, concession, etc. Consequently, the part of what is usually considered as ‘arbitrary behavior’ in this field will be significantly reduced.

1. Introduction

Some French sequences sharing the morphosyntactic pattern \([\text{Preposition} – \text{Definite article} – \text{Noun} – \text{Preposition} – \text{Noun Phrase}]\) have a corresponding “absolute” use without the final preposition and its complementary noun phrase. Examples are \(\text{au-dessus de} – \text{au-dessus} (“above”), \text{à la fin de} – \text{à la fin} (“at the end of”), \text{au début de} – \text{au début} (“at the beginning of”), \text{au sujet de} – *\text{au sujet} (“about”), \text{à l’égard de} – *\text{à l’égard} (“with regard to”), \text{à l’exception de} – *\text{à l’exception} (“except for”). Such patterns need to be subcategorized according to lexical and semantic parameters.
These sequences are frequently classified as “prepositional locutions” in the French linguistic literature (Borillo 1988–2001; Camprubi 1997; Gaatone 1976; Gross, G. 1996; Marque-Pucheu 2001).\(^1\) Nevertheless, it seems that this label is wrongly attached to many of them and that only a few should actually be encompassed within this category, if we recognize that the process of lexicalization that such expressions undergo does not imply in any case a creation of a complex expression that doesn’t tolerate any modification. In fact, a situation like this would better characterize compound prepositions rather than locutions.

The difficulty of determining accurately what a locution is may be due to the fact that many such expressions are at an intermediate stage between compound prepositions, which are, on the one hand, syntactically assimilated to single prepositions, and prepositional phrases (PP), which obey general rules of syntax and semantics. This situation is reflected, among other things, in their reaction to morphosyntactic tests: two similar prepositional locutions sharing the same morphological features can react differently and unpredictably to the same test (for instance, the possibility of modification of the nominal nucleus by an adjective). However, while these tests reflect the lexicalization process, they cannot set up a precise classification of the different categories mentioned above.

The present study will proceed in two stages: first (see Sections 2 and 3), we will establish a categorization method that needs to be applied prior to other tests, and whose purpose is to draw a clear border between the different prepositional expressions (following Adler 2001). This will allow us to show that the absolute use is not correlated to lexical status. Both lexicalized and free expressions can accept or reject the absolute use. However, once it is made clear that many of these alleged prepositional locutions are nothing more than regular prepositional phrases, the absolute use can no longer be unconditionally attributed to ellipsis, as this has been the case up to the present moment (Borillo 1988–2001), if we understand that this process affects essential constituents of the sentence (Lyons 1974; Thomas 1979; Zribi-Hertz 1985). Only the deletion of complements of compound prepositions and prepositional locutions can be said to be attributed to ellipsis. Omission of *de X* within the prepositional phrase will, on the other hand, be attributed to other anaphoric processes like the associative anaphora (Charolles 1990 & 1994; Choi-Jonin 1998; Fradin 1984; Kleiber 1997 & 2001; Le Pesant 1996; Reichler-Béguelin 1989).

The second stage (see Sections 4 and 5) will examine why, regardless of their lexical status, mainly temporal and spatial prepositional expressions naturally accept the absolute use (following Adler 2006b & 2007a) in contrast with prepositional expressions denoting cause, consequence, goal, comparison, opposition, concession, etc., thus leading to a discussion on the inherent properties of the definite article included in this matrix. In fact, it is possible to demonstrate that the absolute use of temporal and spatial prepositional expressions, as well as the general absence of such use in the case of the other expressions, depends on the possibility of the definite article to denote uniqueness (Corblin 1987). Consequently, the part of what is usually considered as “arbitrary behavior” in the field of locutions and compound prepositions may be drastically reduced.

2. **Compound prepositions, prepositional locutions, prepositional phrases: A categorization method**

One of the most current ways to distinguish prepositional locutions from prepositional phrases and to examine the non-predictable nature of the former is to submit these sequences to a variety of morphosyntactic tests. These may consist, for instance, of the possibility of replacement of the definite article by another anaphoric determiner, such as a possessive (in case of an animate complement) or a demonstrative (for non-animate entities) referring to the absent complement with a de head [à l’égard de X (“with regard to”) – à son égard, à cet égard]; the introduction of an adjectival modifier applied to the nominal nucleus [à l’attention de X (“to the attention of”) – à l’aimable attention de X]; the repetition of de, exclusively, i.e. without the other components of the prepositional locution in coordinating structures [à l’égard de Paul et de sa femme (“with regard to Paul and to his wife”)]; finally, the suppression of de consequently to the omission of the complement in case of its replacement by a null pronoun, i.e. ellipsis [au-dessus de la table (“above the table”): au-dessus].

The major weakness of this method is that tests are often applied in a schematic way and tend in many cases not to be relevant for a specific sequence.

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2. For some of these semantic categories see Adler (2007b).

3. Unlike French prepositions such as avant, devant, pour, etc. de does not tolerate the suppression of its complement.

4. For instance, in respect of the possibility of replacement of the definite article by a possessive determiner, à l’insu de (“without the knowledge of”) will be marked by a positive sign (+),
Moreover, how would one determine exactly which would be the discriminating test in case of doubt? Finally, we will have to add the fact that these tests do not always fulfill their original goal: all the tests isolating the default preposition *de* from the rest of the components do not expose the unpredictable character of the sequence, as they claim. They rather prove that this preposition has to be taken as a functional component, as opposed to the other – preceding – components.

This problematic situation had led to the setting up of new criteria for categorizing the different types of such prepositional sequences (Adler 2001). Instead of relying on tests in order to reveal its so-called true status, the prepositional expression [*Preposition – Definite article – Noun – Preposition*] has to be contrasted with the same expression without the introductory preposition [*Definite article – Noun – Preposition*]. If both combinations remain semantically equivalent, the prepositional sequence does not enter into the category of lexicalization or idiomacity, and is treated as a regular prepositional phrase, i.e. a free prepositional composition syntactically and semantically predictable. Thus, *à la fin de X – la fin de X* (“at the end of”), *sur le côté de X – le côté de X* (“on the side of”), *à l’attention de X – l’attention de X* (“to the attention of”), *sur le modèle de X – le modèle de X* (“on the model of”) are prepositional phrases, for the relation between the nominal nucleus and the argument *X* remains unmodified. This stage is prior to the application of tests, which can of course confirm or consolidate data, but which lack the power of conclusive determination.

As we can see, this method has the advantage of establishing a clear-cut border between free prepositional expressions and lexicalized ones, but in order to provide a better outline of the situation, it is necessary to go on distinguishing two subcategories in the field of lexicalized expressions: that of compound prepositions and that of prepositional locutions. The first consists of syntactic blocs that do not tolerate any modification; the second consists of an intermediate stage between the compound prepositions and the prepositional phrases. Let us illustrate this point with *au mépris de* (“despite”) and *à l’instar de* (“like”): both

whereas a negative sign (–) will appear in the column checking the possible alternation of the definite article with a demonstrative adjective. But this reaction is completely natural, since the complement of this sequence can be solely animate. We have to recognize that many of these reactions are motivated, as they are in the field of free expressions: *sur le côté gauche de* (“on the left side of”) is more natural – considering the restrictive function of the adjective and the necessary nature of the information it conveys – than, for example, *sur le côté formidable de* (“on the great side of”).

5. Thus, *à l’égard de* accepts several transformations (*à son égard, à cet égard*), similarly to *au sujet de* (*à son sujet, à ce sujet*) but only the second one authorizes the modification by *seul*: *au seul sujet de/* ?*au seul égard de.*
are opaque combinations, semantically speaking, which means that a comparison with the same sequence without the introductory preposition would not be relevant in this case. Yet, only à l’instar de tolerates some modifications (à son in-
star “like him/ her”) as opposed to au mépris de, which is completely frozen. This will lead us to classify au mépris de as a compound preposition, and à l’instar de as a locution.

Another situation that may motivate locutional treatment is that of a transparent meaning of the nominal nucleus, but a non-equivalent relation between [Preposition – Definite article – Noun – Preposition] and [Definite article – Noun – Preposition]: à l’imitation de is thus a locution or, at least, is on the point of becoming one because l’imitation de X allows two different readings: subjective (X imitates someone) and objective (someone imitates X), while à l’imitation de X neutralizes the subjective reading, and denotes exclusively a situation in which X serves as a basis for imitation.

The same goes for the spatio-temporal sequence au milieu de (= in the middle of):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>au milieu</th>
<th>des gens (parmi)</th>
<th>(“among people”)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>du danger</td>
<td>du danger</td>
<td>(“surrounded by danger”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>des rires (dans)</td>
<td>des rires (dans)</td>
<td>(“amid the laughter”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de notre réunion (pendant)</td>
<td>de notre réunion (pendant)</td>
<td>(“in the middle of our meeting”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de la table</td>
<td>de la table</td>
<td>(“in the middle of the table”)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

None of the combinations above may alternate with the same sequence without the introductory preposition, i.e. in a NP: au milieu des gens – *le milieu des gens/ au milieu des rires – *le milieu des rires. Moreover, even with regular spatio-temporal readings, idiomaticity is involved: le milieu de la nuit, for instance, means “the middle of the night” or, in other terms, minuit (“midnight”), describing an equal distance, a halfway, between extremes of a temporal nature. Au milieu de la nuit (“in the middle of the night”) is, on the other hand, more flexible, in a sense that it can easily apply to a situation where there is no equidistance from extremes in time: when someone claims that he couldn’t sleep because in the middle of the night his neighbor made a lot of noise, the specific in the middle of the night can refer to “four o’clock in the morning”.

3. The precise nature of the absolute use

If we restrict ellipsis to an intentional omission of parts of speech – essential both structurally and semantically – that can be easily and immediately reconstructed
from context (Bally 1950; Lyons 1974; Thomas 1979; Zribi-Hertz 1985), then unfinished sentences, silence, laconic versions, deletion of grammatical components void of lexical information (I thought that you were gone – I thought you were gone), non-realization of traces and other components assumed necessary for the management of syntactic positions below the surface level, and even non-mention of circumstantial or determinative complements, that is to say, non-structurally essential parts, should all be described by parameters other than elliptical ones.

Thus, regarding the last case mentioned above, example (1) below illustrates ellipsis, unlike example (2) where the non-essential temporal complement demain soir is presumably missing from the second utterance. On fête l’anniversaire de Paul is an independent, well-formed unit even if, pragmatically speaking, one is entitled to infer that the time of the celebration in question is identical to that mentioned in the preceding utterance. If we explain the absence of the temporal adverbial in terms of ellipsis, this could simply imply that most utterances are actually elliptic, due to the fact that their predication is necessarily connected to a specific place and time that are not always mentioned. The strongly dependent character of the elliptical utterance has to be solely verified within the unit containing the null pronoun, i.e. within the micro-system. In other words, the need to fill up the gap created by ellipsis is a grammatical requirement, not a stylistic choice of the speaker. Ellipsis is not just an omission; it is an anaphoric process consisting of activating an absent noun phrase:

(1) J’ai cherché mon sac partout, mais j’ai complètement oublié que j’étais venu sans 0.
‘I’ve looked for my bag everywhere but I completely forgot that I came without 0 (= without it).’

(2) Viens chez nous demain soir. On fête l’anniversaire de Paul.
‘Come over tomorrow night. We’re celebrating Paul’s birthday.’

The absence of de X in all of the prepositional sequences described in this paper is usually regarded as a particular case of ellipsis (Borillo 1988–2001). The motivation of such strategy is clear, for these expressions without de X cannot be decoded without context (as in example (5)):

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(3) *Va voir ce film. *A la fin 0 il y a quelque chose que tu aimeras (0 = du film). ‘Go see that movie. *At the end 0 there is something you’ll like (0 = of the movie).

(4) *A la fin du film il y a quelque chose que tu aimeras. ‘*At the end of the movie there is something you’ll like.’

(5) **A la fin 0 il y a quelque chose que tu aimeras. ‘**At the end 0 there is something you’ll like.’

However, once the category of lexicalized expressions (compound prepositions and prepositional locutions) ceases to be overburdened by the excessive weight of what appears to be mere prepositional phrases, one has to reconsider also the real nature of the anaphoric process involved in the case of the absolute use. More precisely, *de X* will have a different status according to whether *[[Preposition – Definite article – Noun – Preposition (de)]]* is an idiomatic expression or a free combination:

*Au-dessus de X* (= above): idiomatic expression

\[
[\text{PP} \text{ [prep à – le – dessus – de]} \text{ [NP, X]}]
\]

*Sur le dessus de X* (= on the upper side of, on the top of): free combination

\[
[\text{PP} \text{ [prep sur]} \text{ [NP [det le] [N dessus] [NP [prep de] [NP X]]]]}
\]

This suggests that only in the case of the lexicalized sequence, is *de X* structurally obligatory, which leads to the inevitable conclusion that ellipsis, at least as defined at the beginning of this section, applies exclusively to this category of prepositional expressions. In other words, the potentially absent complement with a *de* head corresponds here to a semantically open but structurally closed category. The relation between the preposition and its complement is established syntactically.

If that is the case, how do we explain the absence of *de X* in the prepositional phrases? The answer here is not one-dimensional. We will deal first with the associative anaphora, which is applied mainly to spatio-temporal prepositional phrases. Unlike ellipsis, this strategy of economy involves stereotypic knowledge in the deciphering of the antecedent – anaphora relation (Azoulay 1978; Charolles 1990 & 1994; Choi-Jonin 1998; Fradin 1984; Kleiber 1997 & 2001; Minsky 1977;

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7. This last sentence can be decoded only by reference to the situational context, e.g. when the speaker passes reading material to the addressee.
Reichler-Béguelin 1989; Schank & Abelson 1977, among many others). More precisely, the absence here corresponds to an ontologically closed category, lexically required by the nominal head. Let us examine examples (6) and (7):

(6) Tu connais ce magasin? Je t'attends à l'entrée (= à l'entrée du magasin).
    ‘Do you know that store? I’ll wait for you at the entrance (= at the entrance of the store).’

(7) Alors, t’as vu ce film ? Ils montrent le restaurant de Paul tout au début
    (= au début du film).
    ‘So, have you seen that movie? They show Paul’s restaurant at the very beginning (= at the beginning of the movie).’

Between the nominal head *entrée* or *début*, denoting a spatial or a temporal part, and *magasin* or *film* denoting the spatial whole or the containing interval, there exists a pre-established ontological relation, and the inference of the containing element, in the case of the absolute use, is imposed by the lexicon or by our encyclopedic knowledge. Nouns like *entrée* or *beginning* denote an inherent partitivity. We cannot make a claim here for ellipsis of the noun representing the whole, since the relation existing between the part and the containing element goes beyond the contextual constraints by implying pragmatic parameters. Even if one is not acquainted with the store or the movie in question, he can infer that a place has – conventionally – an entrance, and that an event has – conventionally – a beginning, hence the use of the definite article.8

Another possible situation for the absence of *de X* within the prepositional phrase may be illustrated by sequences like *sous la domination de* (‘under the domination of’), *sous l’oppression de* (‘under the oppression of’), *sous la tyrannie de* (‘under the tyranny of’) for which the absolute use is non anaphoric.9 The absolute use allows one to focus on the specific state of the subordinated subject. The definite article denotes the uniqueness of the subordination. *Sous le choc de* (‘under the shock of’) is another PP:

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8. See Section 5.

9. These are free expressions: *sous la domination de* – *la domination de)* / *sous le choc de* – *le choc de*. Several tests confirm this status: *vivre sous la domination française* (adjectival complement)/ *vivre sous une domination étrangère* (indefinite article)/ *sous la domination despotique, injuste, tyrannique de X* (adjectival modification). In addition, the preposition *sous* is semantically motivated: the person undergoing oppression is in a metaphorically inferior position.