

All things prepositional in the history of English

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This paper investigates changes in prepositional argument structure in the history of English, viz. patterns featuring verb-attached prepositional phrases fulfilling various functions from prototypical adjuncts to complements. I use data from the *Penn-Helsinki Corpora of Historical English*, covering Middle, Early Modern, and Late Modern English (ca. 1150 to 1900) to assess the general hypothesis that PPs increased in frequency and expanded in functions over time as part of the general shift of English from a more synthetic to a more analytic language (e.g. Baugh & Cable 2002). I do so by zooming in on three particular case studies: (i) the development of prepositional verbs such as *insist on*, (ii) competition between PPs and NPs in the conative alternation, like in *kick (at) the ball*, and (iii) competition between PPs and NPs with time expressions as in *(on) that day, we left*. Overall, the results suggest that the history of English PPs is more complex than often presumed (e.g. Szmrecsyani 2016), and demonstrate an intricate interplay of cognitive factors like complexity and lexical biases in PP-diachrony (e.g. Levshina 2018; Pijpops et al. 2018).

References

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