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Prepositions

Prepositions

- So far, our grammar-making is moving along nicely, and the model grammar that we have discovered can now generate many different kinds of sentences. Still, it cannot generate all of them, and you have probably spotted some of its inadequacies.

Consider the following sentences:

- John scrambled over the barricade.
- The smugglers sneaked the contraband past the guards.
- The genetic researchers crossed a tiger with a lion.
- Each of these phrases has the intuitive feel of a unit, and each consists of a noun phrase preceded by a word such as **over**, **past**, or **with**. We will call words of this kind **PREPOSITIONS (P)** because they are placed before noun phrases. The word *over* is a preposition, and the entire constituent **over the barricade** can be called a **PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE (PP)**. A prepositional phrase consists of a preposition followed by a noun phrase.
- **PP -----> P NP**

In the examples above, the prepositional phrases occur at the end of sentences. But... Is the prepositional phrase part of the verb phrase, or is it a separate major constituent of the sentence?. These two options for writing phrase-structure rules involving prepositional phrases are shown in the following rules: (John scrambled over the barricade)

- S -----> NP VP	Or:	- S -----> NP VP (PP)
- VP -----> V (NP) (PP)		- VP -----> V (NP)

Both options work in the sense that both can generate the desired sentence, but Does one tree better reflect our intuitions about the structure of the sentence?

One reason to prefer the first option/rule, which has the prepositional phrase as a constituent of the verb phrase, has to do with meaning: *Over the barricade* should be considered part of the verb phrase, because it **'modifies' or 'completes'** the verb *scrambled*.

That is, it describes where the scrambling took place. Accordingly, we will adopt the first rule and reject the second one and that is:

S -----> NP VP
VP -----> V (NP) (PP)

Beth jumped from the table.
Larry opened the oyster with a knife.

Prepositional Phrases within Noun Phrases

- Each of the prepositional phrases we have so far considered has occurred within a verb phrase. These prepositional phrases can be said to 'modify' the verbs they follow in that they provide information telling when, where, how, or why the action took place.

- **Now consider the following sentences:**

The house *on the hill* overlooked the valley.

The cover *of the book* attracted attention.

The old man *with the harmonica* knew the words to the songs.

None of the italicized prepositional phrases seems to be modifying a verb. Instead, each identifies the noun that it follows and so can be said to modify that noun. For example, *on the hill* tells us which house overlooked the valley.

- **Therefore, we can revise our noun-phrase rule accordingly:**

NP-----> (Art) (Adj)+ N (PP)

- The old man with the harmonica knew the words to the song.
- We have now seen prepositional phrases that modify verbs and others that modify nouns. You may wonder if there is a way to determine which is which.

- **The phrase's position in the sentence is not necessarily an indication. Consider the following examples:**

- Joe hit the ball with the bat.
- Joe admired the woman with the hat.
- It is necessary to consider meaning of a prepositional phrase and the purpose it serves in the sentence in order to identify which element it modifies. For example, *with the bat* tells us how Joe did the hitting. Consequently, it modifies the verb *hit* and is a constituent of a verb phrase. In the second example, *with the hat* does not tell us how Joe did the admiring (he didn't admire her with a hat). Instead it tells us which woman we are talking about. It modifies the noun *woman* and is a constituent of a noun phrase.
- Joe hit the ball with the bat.
- Joe admired the woman with the hat.

Exercises

1- Draw tree diagrams for these sentences:

Joe cleaned the grease from the axle.

Saud flew across Tibet.

The contents of the box puzzled Cassandra.

2- Underline the prepositional phrases in the following sentences. For each prepositional phrase, state whether it is a constituent of a verb phrase or a of a noun phrase.

Mahmoud steered the boat through rough seas.

Lulu met a woman from Lithuania.

Notes: