

# A Contrastive Analysis of the Prepositions “Of” and “From”

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to contribute to a better understanding of how prepositions are used. One of the grammatical features of contrastive analysis is preposition. In English there are more prepositions than in Persian. The contrastive analysis of this paper is focused on two English prepositions: *of* and *from*. These prepositions are used in many situations, but most of the time the learners get confused. They don't know the correct usage in a context. This study defined the prepositions *of* and *from* based on two dictionaries. Understanding these definitions help EFL learners to decrease their mistakes in using this group of prepositions. As the study will show, their usage differs in certain contexts.

**Key words:** contrastive analysis, preposition, of, from, error analysis

## 1. Introduction

Keshavarz (2011) defined contrastive analysis (CA) as "the systematic study of a pair of languages in order to identify their structural differences and similarities, usually for translation and teaching purposes" (p. 5). Theoretical and applied are two kinds of contrastive studies. This paper is a kind of theoretical study that focuses on preposition. One of the grammatical features in contrastive analysis is preposition. Prepositions are, together with articles, one of the most frequently used words in the English language. In every grammar of English, basic information on the usage of prepositions along with the features of prepositions as a word class can usually be found (Huddleston & Pullum 2002, Quirk et al. 1985, Sinclair 1990, as cited in Macková, 2012).

Wren and Martin (2006) defined preposition as "A word placed before a noun or a pronoun to show in what relation the thing denoted by it stands in regard to something else" (P. 106). Koffi (2010) stated that English has a higher number of prepositions than most other languages about 60 to 70. In English many prepositions are monosyllabic (on, for, to,) while half of them have two syllables (without, under, behind, without) or more (underneath, not withstanding) (as cited in Bilal, Tariq, Yaqub, & Kanwal, 2013). The following nine prepositions are estimated to have over 90 percent of preposition usage:

|             |           |            |
|-------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>With</b> | <b>At</b> | <b>By</b>  |
| <b>To</b>   | <b>In</b> | <b>For</b> |
| <b>From</b> | <b>Of</b> | <b>On</b>  |

Classification of prepositions can be on the basis of their functions e.g. Preposition for time (I will reach at five O' clock), place (He lives in Lahore), direction (Maria went to laboratory), agent (The room was painted by him), and instrument (She opened the locker with key) (Bilal et al., 2013).

The aim of this paper is to contribute to better understanding of how prepositions are used. The contrastive analysis of this paper is focused on two English prepositions, *of* and *from*. These prepositions are used in many situations, but most of the time the learners become confused. This article explains the main reason for confusion and the use of both *of* and *from* in English. It is difficult to understand the difference between these two prepositions in English for many Persian and English learners (Keshavarz, 2011). As the study will show, their usage differs in certain contexts. This short guide to the differences between (*of* and *from*) in English can help EFL learners to use these prepositions.

## 2. Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis

In 1960s when structural linguistics and behavioral psychology were dominant, contrastive analysis hypothesis (CAH) model was developed. Brown (2000) states "CAH claimed that the principal barrier to second language acquisition is the interference of first language system with the second language system, that a scientific, structural analysis of the two languages in question would yield a taxonomy of linguistic contrasts between them, which in turn would enable the linguist to predict the difficulties a learner would encounter" (as cited in Bilal et al., 2013, P.208). According to this hypothesis, the interference of first language with the second language takes place especially in the use of prepositions.

A clear example of native language interference is the problem with prepositions. One problem with prepositions is that in English there are more prepositions than in Persian. In Persian, for example, the preposition /ʔʔz/ can mean: form, in, by, over, of, through, than, by way of, because, out of, or belonging to. The Persian preposition /be/ can mean: to, in, into, at, on, of, with, upon, for, from and as (Yarmohammadi, 1996).

## 3. Theoretical Background of the Issue

The class of prepositions with its basic characteristics has been discussed in different grammars (Biber et al., 1999, Huddleston, 1984, Alexander, 1988, Dušková, 1988, as cited in Macková, 2012). It is interesting to note that not all grammarians have treated prepositions as a separate word class. As Weber (2012) observes, "[t]here are several grammars of the most recent decades which did not devote a single chapter to the study of prepositions, and do not provide us with their definitions" (P.24).

In those grammars in which prepositions are treated as a separate word class, different definitions of prepositions can be found. For instance, the definition proposed by Carter and McCarthy (2006) says that "prepositions express a relation in space between two or more entities or a relation in time between two events, or various other abstract relations" (p. 462). Furthermore, some grammarians provide a list of properties by which they distinguish the class of prepositions from other word classes. According to Huddleston (1988) the properties are: (as cited in Macková, 2012)

- Inflection: they do not enter into inflectional contrasts
- Complementation: they can take as complement an NP or a tensed declarative clause (however, other kinds of complements are allowed as well, e.g. an interrogative clause)
- Modification: they allow only a modest amount of modification
- Function: they function as head in PP2 structure

Huddleston indicates that these properties are kind of "clear members of the closed preposition class in English" (p.124-25). In other words, some of certain prepositions do not only belong to the class of prepositions and can function as, for instance, adverbs (e.g. *above, in, down, to*) or conjunctions (e.g. *after, as, but, for*). Huddleston's criteria thus apply only to instances in which such polysemous words are used as prepositions.

According to Carter and McCarthy (2006), "[t]here are over 100 prepositions in English, including complex and marginal prepositions" (as cited in Macková, 2012, P.463). All prepositions according to their composition can be divided into two groups:

- (1) Simple prepositions: e.g. *about, at, before, for, from, in, into, on, out, over, of, through, to, under, with*
- (2) Complex prepositions: e.g. (two-word) *because of, due to, instead of*, (three-word) *as far as, in accordance with, on behalf of*.

## 4. A Contrastive Analysis of the Prepositions Of and From

### 4.1 Defining the Prepositions Of and From

It seems necessary to define the meaning of each of the two prepositions. Pittman (1967) defined *of* as "parts and qualities of a whole. *Of* is by derivation related to *from* and its simplest and commonest use is in establishing a link between noun and noun". *Of* can be used in other place "*Of* with countable and uncountable nouns...compound nouns" (as cited in Loredó-vera, 2011, P. xvii-xviii). The following examples show the definition:

- ∅ *Parts and qualities of a whole*: This is the backend *of* the road
- ∅ *Of with countable and uncountable nouns*: Here's a box *of* chocolates / This is a can *of* milk
- ∅ *Compound nouns*: It's the blood *of* a human

With regards to *from*, it is basically used to describe where a person is *from*, it can be used for movement, for distance and when mentioning a starting point for directions. Here are examples of each (Loredó-vera, 2011).

- ∅ *Where a person is from*: Carla is *from* Canada

- Ø *For Movement:* She ran *from* the thief
- Ø *For Distance:* *from* New York to Washington DC it's a 4 hours trip
- Ø *Starting point for directions:* *from* here walk straight

## From

### *From - Origins*

*From* is generally used to express that something originates from something else, that something comes from somewhere, or some person (Beare, n.d). For example:

- Ø Jack comes *from* Portland.
- Ø This formula derives *from* the work of Peter Schimmel.
- Ø This pearl comes *from* the South Pacific.

### *From - To / From - Until*

*From* can also be used with the prepositions 'to' and 'until' to mark the starting and ending point of time of an action or state. Generally, 'from ... to' is used with past tenses, while 'from ... until' is used when speaking about future actions. However, 'from ... to' can be used in most situation (Beare, n.d). For example:

- Ø I played tennis from two until four in the afternoon yesterday.
- Ø We are meeting in Chicago from Monday until Thursday.

### 3.1.1 Dictionary entries

This section provides definitions from two hard-copy dictionaries, namely *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, and *Longman Handy learner's Dictionary of American English*.

#### **Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2004)**

##### **From prep**

For the special uses of *from* in phrasal verb, look at the entries for the verbs. For example *keep sth from sb* is in the phrasal verb section at *keep*.

1. Used to show where sb/sth starts: *She began to walk away from him.*
2. Used to show when sth starts: *we're open from 8 to 7 every day.*
3. Used to show who sent or gave sth/sb: *A letter from my brother.*
4. Used to show what the origin of sth/sb: *I'm from Italy.*
5. Used to show the material that sth is made of: *Steel is made from iron.\**
6. Used to show how far apart two places are: *100 meters from the scene of the accident.*
7. Used to show sb's position or point of view: *You can see the island from here.*
- 8 ~ sth (to sth) used to show the range of sth: *The store sells everything from shoelaces to computers.*
- 9 ~ sth (to sth) used to show the state or from of sth /sb before a change: *Things have gone **from bad to worse**.*
10. Used to show that sb/sth is separated or removed: *The party was ousted from power after eighteen years.*
11. Used to show that sth is prevented: *She saved him from drowning.*
12. Used to show the reason for sth: *She felt sick from tiredness.*
13. Used to show the reason for making a judgment: *you can tell a lot about a person from their handwriting.*
14. Used when distinguishing between two people or things: *Is Portuguese very different from Spanish?*

##### **OF prep**

1. Belonging to sb; relating to sb: *A friend of mine.*
2. Belonging to sth; being part of sth; relating to sth: *The lid of the box.*
3. Coming from a particular background or living in a place: *The people of wales.\**
4. Concerning or showing sb/sth: *A photo of my dog.*
5. Use to say what sb/sth is, consist of, or contains: *The city of Dublin.*
6. Used with measurements and expression of time, age, etc: *2 kilos of potatoes.*
7. Used to show sb/sth belongs to a group, often after some, a few, etc: *Some of his friends.*
8. Used to show the position of sth/sb in space or time: *At the time of the revolution.*
9. Used after nouns formed from verbs. The noun after 'of can be either the object or the subject of the action: *The arrival of the police (= they arrive).*
10. Used after some verbs before mentioning sb/sth involved in the action: *He was cleared of all blame.*
11. Used after some adjectives before mentioning sb/ sth that a feeling relates to: *To be ashamed/ proud of sth.*
12. Used to give your opinion of sb's behavior: *It was kind of you to offer.*

13. used when on noun describes a second one: *Where's that idiot of a boy? (= the boy that you think is an idiot)*

### **Longman Handy Learner's Dictionary of American English (2005)**

#### **FROM** *prep*

1. Starting at (a place or time): *fly from New York to Paris.*
2. Given or sent by: *a letter from John.*
3. Away: *subtract 10 from 15.*
4. Using: *bread is made from flour.\**
5. Because of: *suffer from hard disease.\**
6. Out of: *he took a knife from his pocket.*
7. In a state of protection or prevention with regard to: *she saved the child from drowning.*
8. Judging by: *from what John tells me, they're very rich.*

#### **OF** *prep*

1. Belonging to: *the wheels of the car*
2. Made from: *a crown of gold*
3. Containing: *a bag of potatoes*
4. (show a part or mount): *2 pounds of sugar*
5. A. that is/are: a friend of mine. B. Happening in or on: *the Battle of Bunker Hill*
6. In relation to; in connection with: *a teacher of English*
7. A. done by: the plays of Shakespeare B. done about: *a picture of Shakespeare*
8. With; having: *a matter of no importance*
9. (Shows what someone or sth is or does): *How kind of you.*
10. (Used in dates): *the 27<sup>th</sup> of February.*
11. During: *we often go there of an evening.\**

EFL and ESL students should be familiar with the definitions of these two prepositions in order to use them accurately. Their definitions with different examples from various dictionaries would help students to know the differences between two languages and perform better in learning the two languages. The reason to define these prepositions here is to get familiar with different definitions. The best way to avoid making a mistake or encountering fewer mistakes in using prepositions is to understand and to command of all their definitions and usage. The asterisks above parts indicate where the Iranian learners get confused and make more mistakes in the use of these English prepositions.

### **5. Prepositions in English and Persian**

Prepositions may present enormous difficulties for Persian-speaking learners of the English language. There is difficulty in the variety of forms and functions of prepositions in English as well as the differences between English and Persian with regard to the form and function of prepositions. Prepositions convey important semantic and discourse functions. They express conceptions such as: time, place, directions, purpose and manner, to mention but a few. One of the possible sources of difficulty and errors is the differences between English and Persian prepositions. The contrasted features are indicated here. Each of the following example sentences consists of: (a) English sentence (henceforth E), (b) Persian equivalent (P), (c) literal translation (LT) of the English sentence, and (d) finally the predictable error (PE) (Keshavarz, 2011).

In case of English and Persian prepositions there are four possibilities, as illustrated below:

**Category 1:** There exists a preposition in English with no equivalent in Persian.

- ✓ The book consists of five chapters. (E)
- ✓ Ketab Jamele pændj fæsl æst. (P)
- ✓ Book consists ø five chapter is. (LT)
- ✓ The book consists ø five chapters. (PE)

**Category 2:** There is a preposition in Persian with no equivalent in English.

- ✓ Ma æz mænazere ziba lezæst bordim (P)
- ✓ We from sceneries beautiful enjoyed (LT)
- ✓ We enjoyed **from** the beautiful sceneries. (PE)
- ✓ We enjoyed the beautiful sceneries. (E)

**Category 3:** For several prepositions in English there exists only one counterpart in

Persian.

- ✓
- ✓ Cat under table is (LT)
- ✓ The cat is under the table. (E)

**Category 4:** Both languages have prepositions; the forms and functions of prepositions are different in English and Persian.

- ✓ Most women are afraid from mice.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper looked into differences in the use of *of* and *from*. Prepositions convey important semantic and discourse functions (Keshavarz, 2011). Comparing the functions of preposition in English and Persian showed that there are differences in the use of these two prepositions (*of* and *from*). This article showed the different definitions of these two prepositions in different contexts. The study also indicated where Iranian learners normally make errors. In English there are more prepositions than in Persian (Yarmohammadi, 1996), which can cause that the learner becomes confused in using them. As Keshavarz (2011) has commented, Iranian learners' first language system could have interference in second language system and naturally in the use of prepositions, so the learners should do adequate exercises to overcome the barriers and pave the way of learning English.

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