English Prepositions in the History of English Grammar Writing

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The paper intends to trace the four hundred years of the history of English grammar writing with special reference to English prepositions. It provides the reader with some of the most influential definitions of prepositions and scrutinizes approaches to their study as adopted in these grammars. It comes with a conclusion that, as far as prepositions are concerned, the history of English grammar writing can be seen as one of relative stagnation, only exceptionally interrupted by certain more influential authors like Bullokar, Miège, Maittaire, Brightland, Greenwood or Lowth. It was only in the second half of the twentieth century that the situation radically changed and since then, grammarians have introduced scientifically precise definitions and developed detailed and elaborate frameworks for their description.

1. Introduction

The present paper aims to examine the development of different linguistic definitions and treatments of prepositions in selected reference grammars of English. Although one of the first grammarians to introduce the term preposition was Dionysius Thrax, who lived in Alexandria some time around the second and first century BCE, in the present paper, I shall limit myself strictly to the English grammatical tradition, whose roots date back to the second half of the sixteenth century. A demarcation of the object of my research in these terms, however, is not sufficient enough. The reason is that in the very beginnings of English grammatical tradition, the term English grammar might have referred to a grammar of Latin written in English, a grammar of English written in Latin, as well as a grammar of English written in English. It must be stressed, therefore, that in the present survey, attention will only be paid to reference grammars of English written in English. And yet, this still includes vast amount of works by various authors. Accordingly, the scope of the pre-
sent paper is highly selective in what it covers and the majority of grammars were simply not included. Nevertheless, the author of these lines focused on, in his opinion, the most representative ones and believes that these will provide readers with a sufficient insight into the research topic.

2. The situation before 1586

Although the year 1586 marks the beginning of English grammar writing, a definition of prepositions can already be found in Old English literature:

Præpositio is *foresetnyss*, se byð geðeod naman and worde and stent æfra on foreweardan: *ab illo homine* `fram ðam man’: her is se *ab* præpositio.

(Aelfric’s Preface to his translation of *Ars Grammatica* by Donatus Aelius)

This definition is far from being linguistically correct, since already in the Old English period, there sometimes occurred postposed prepositions. Aelfric’s definition, as well as the term *foresetnyss* itself, imitates the Latin original by Donatus Aelius. The Anglo-Saxon term for a preposition is derived from the Latin term *praepositio*, the morpheme *for* meaning ‘before’, the root *settan* meaning ‘to place’ and the derivational morpheme +*nyss* indicates the class of nouns. The Anglo-Saxon calque, nevertheless, did not gain much popularity and the Latin original penetrated into the English lexical system in the late fourteenth century (cf. *Oxford English Dictionary*).

3. English grammars in the shackles of Latin grammars

By the end of the sixteenth century, grammars had been written for nearly all of the European vernacular languages. It is a well-known fact that there was a strong influence of Latin grammatical traditions upon these grammars and the English ones were no exception. In fact, in the case of English grammars, this trend continued up to the eighteenth century, when certain grammarians finally realized that differences between Latin and English were too great and Latin grammars could not form the basis for the description of English. In a word, one can undoubtedly claim that “the history of English grammar writing was one of gradual and hard-won liberation from the shackles of Latin grammar” (Linn 2006: 74). Grammarians influenced by Latin traditions were, for instance, likely to consider English prepositional phrases as pure equivalents of Latin cases. Prepositions with a different function were usually deemed to be adverbs or, in some cases, were assigned to a separate word class. As far as the first hundred and fifty years of English grammar writing are concerned, Vorlat discerns the following tendencies:
a. Poole, Newton, the 1706 grammar, Turner and Entick – copy Latin grammars, without insight into a specific functioning of the English prepositions

b. some valuble remarks are made right at the beginning of English grammar writing by Bullokar, however much he may generally depend on his Latin source

c. authors as Miège, Duncan, Maittaire and Brightland (with Loughton) appear to have an original contribution to make. (Vorlat 1975: 403)

4. Bullokar and after

The oldest study of English prepositions is represented right at the beginning of English grammar writing by William Bullokar’s Bref Grammar for English (Bullokar 1586), the first English grammar written in English. Bullokar defines prepositions as

a part of speech properly used prepositively, that is governing an accusative case set next after it (except sometime in verse it is set after his casual word) as, I go too the church: and is sometime postpositively used, that is, when it governeth the relative, that, or which, coming before a verb, whose governing preposition is set after such verb: as, this is the man whom we spoke of, or whome we spoke; and is some time used in composition after a verb, but being severed from the verb by the adverb, not, or by an accusative case, may be said to be set in apposition adverbially. (Bullokar 1586: 47)

First of all, it is interesting to observe that Bullokar takes notice of the fact that prepositions can occur postpositively, an important syntactic property commonly disregarded by later grammarians. Bullokar considers as prepositions those items which govern the accusative case, otherwise, he regards them as adverbs. A unique feature of his work is that in his analysis, the prepositions up, down, in, before, beneath, behynd, beyond, under, nær and nih can form their respective comparative and superlative degrees, and in this way form adjectives or adverbials:

- up → uper, upermost/upmost
- down → downer, downermost/downmost
- in → iner, inermost/inmost
- before → former, foremost
- beneath → næther, næthermost
- behynd → hynder, hyndermost/hyndmost
- beyond → yonderer, yondermost/yondmost
- under → undermost
- nær → nærer, next
- nih → niher, next

(Bullokar 1586: 48-49)
Bullokar’s grammar did not miss word-formative aspect of English prepositions either. He notes that some prepositions can take the suffix +ward, e.g. inward, outward, in this way creating adjectives which can be further modified into adverbs by adding +ly, e.g. inwardly. To present-day speakers of English, affixation to prepositions might seem odd. Nevertheless, especially during the Middle English period, the suffix +ward really occurred in combinations with certain prepositions (cf. Mustanoja 1960: 423). The only remnant of this process in Present-day English is toward(s). As far as semantics is concerned, Bullokar observes that prepositions compounded before a verb commonly change the meaning of a respective verb while prepositions compounded after a verb retain its proper signification. To sum up, the first English grammar provides a relatively thorough treatment of prepositions, studying them on morphological, syntactic and semantic levels. The following decades, and the grammars they produced, devoted considerably less space to the study of prepositions and most of them, as already mentioned, were strongly influenced by definitions from Latin grammars.

In The English Accidence, prepositions are defined simply as “a part of speech undeclined, most commonly set before the words which they govern” (Poole 1646: 19). Subsequently, Poole provides the reader with a syntactic classification of prepositions into three basic groups. Those which govern accusative, those which govern ablative, and those which govern both accusative and ablative. A similar definition can be found in Wharton’s grammar: “A Preposition is a part of speech set before other parts; either in Apposition, or Composition” (Wharton 1654: 58). Another definition strongly influenced by Latin grammatical tradition is Newton’s: “A Preposition is a word commonly set before other Parts of Speech, either in Apposition […] or in Composition” (Newton 1669: 51). A very vague definition can be found in a grammar by Miège: “A Preposition is a Word that expreses some Circumstance or other of the Noun” (Miège 1688: 7). In his description, Miège observes that “[a]lthough the Prepositions took that Name from their being commonly placed before Nouns, yet in English they are often placed at the end of a Sentence” (Miège 1688: 80). Miège is therefore the second author after Bullokar to explicitly notice the possibility of a postposition. As he puts it, postposition takes place especially after the pronouns who and what. As far as the relation of the verb and preposition is concerned, Miège claims that when preceded by a preposition, the verb forms one compound word with it, while when used after the verb, it is distinct from it. Finally, Miège deals with the ellipsis of prepositions which, according to his observations, takes place when two nouns are transposed (e.g. Glory of God → God’s Glory), after some verbs (e.g. send it me, bring it me), before the word home (e.g. to go home), and in some fixed expressions (e.g. a house forty foot high instead of a house to the height of forty foot). Cases when prepositions are not followed by a noun are regarded as an adverbial uses.
In Aickin’s grammar, no chapter is dedicated specifically to prepositions, and their definition is also quite simple: “A Preposition is a part of Speech, which is commonly set before other parts of Speech, either in Apposition, as of me, to God: or else in Composition as, toward, upward, forward” (Aickin 1693: 5-6). Another simple definitions of prepositions can be found in an anonymous grammar of 1706, where we read that “[a] Preposition is a Part of Speech set before other Words” (Anonym 1706: 17) and in Turner’s grammar: “A Preposition is a Word set before other Words, either to govern them […] or else in Composition with them” (Turner 1710: 35).

In Brightland and Gildon’s grammar, we can discern the first hints of prepositions considered as functions expressing relations among things. “Prepositions, or Foreplaced Words, were invented […] to show the Relations, that Things have to one another” (Brightland/Gildon 1711: 117). Their definition is extralinguistically focused since they claim that prepositions express relations among things rather than words. However, the first truly systematic treatment of English prepositions can be found in Greenwood’s Practical English Grammar. “A Preposition is a Part of Speech, which being added to any other Parts of Speech, serves to mark or signify their State or Reference to each other” (Greenwood 1711: 71). Greenwood subsequently clarifies that by using the word added, he wants to stress that prepositions are used before as well as after a word. He names nouns, pronouns, verbs, participles, article and adverbs as those parts of speech which can be preceded by a preposition. On the following page, Greenwood paraphrases his previous definition, stating that “[a] Preposition is a Word added to other Words, to show the Respect, or Relation one Thing has to another” (Greenwood 1711: 72), concluding that all relations expressed in Greek or Latin partly by a diversity of cases and partly by prepositions, are expressed exclusively by prepositions in English. Finally, Greenwood provides the reader with a first detailed empirical account of syntactic and semantic properties of selected English prepositions.

A novel approach to the study of prepositions can easily be discerned in Maittaire’s definition (1712: 92-93):

[The term preposition] signifies a word placed before, and therefore governing and requiring another to follow […] A Preposition is a Particle, which qualifies and explains the signification of some part of speech, by going before a word, which it governs or brings into the clause or sentence […] The Preposition has (no signification) without the word which it precedes, and to which it is in the nature of a sign.

Maittaire’s originality rests in the fact that he considers prepositions to be synsemantic particles that only contribute to the meanings of the word they govern.
Let me add the following definitions of prepositions from other grammars from this period:

It is a Word set before another, either separate from it, or, joined to it. (Entick 1728: 25)

Preposition is an Indeclinable that governs the Nouns that follow it. It serves to modify or circumstantiate the Noun. (Duncan 1731: 43)

A Preposition is a Part of Speech set before other Words, and shews the Relation that the Word following it has to some Word before it. (Barker 1733?: 22-23).

A careful reader can detect the shortcomings of these definitions like merging the concept of the preposition with that of the prefix, neglecting the possible postposition or limiting the attention to the relation between prepositions and nouns only. These were most commonly mistakes of grammarians influenced by the Latin tradition. From time to time, a more elaborate definition occurred:

Prepositions, or Foreplaced Words, are either little Words joyned with other Words in Composition; or such as being put betwixt other Words, (chiefly Names) shew their relation to each other, in affinity, distance, or some other casual circumstance. Some Prepositions are joined in Composition […] Or being put between Words they shew the relation they stand in to each other, usually called Case. (Collyer 1735: 40)

An anonymous 1736 grammar focuses on a contrastive definition:

A Preposition is a Part of Speech set before other Word before it […] In the Latin Grammar, they are usually ranked under these two Heads, viz. Prepositions in Apposition, and Prepositions in Composition […] the English Tongue […] not only applies them to the same uses and ends that the Latin Tongue doth; but also to supply that which the Latin Tongue does another way, viz. in making up the several Cases of Nouns, which the Latins do by different Terminations or Endings thereof. (Anonym 1736: 67-69)

Other authoritative grammars of this period include Saxon’s and Priestley’s:

A Preposition […] is a Word set before others; either to govern them […] or else in Composition with them […] Prepositions govern Nouns, &c. and being placed before them, shew the Production, Motion or Situation of Things. (Saxon 1737: 75)

A Preposition is a word that expresseth the relation that one word hath to another. (Priestley 1761: 28)

A year after the publication of Priestley’s work, one of the most influential grammars of English, written by Robert Lowth, was published. It started the age of prescriptivism. Lowth’s grammar became one of the most popular English grammars and went through over twenty editions in
the following decades. Lowth’s definition of prepositions summarizes the best of the preceding ones in addition to introducing etymological notes on their semantic origin according to which the original function of prepositions was to express place relations, which were later widened to other relations. To put it in his own words (Lowth 1762: 91-92):

Prepositions, so called because they are commonly put before the words to which they are applied, serve to connect words with one another, and to show the relation between them. One great use of Prepositions in English, is to express those relations which in some languages are chiefly marked by Cases, or the different endings of the Noun. Most Prepositions originally denote the relation of Place, and have been thence transferred to denote by similitude other relations.

Lowth was also among the first grammarians to support the prescriptivist suggestion that sentences ending in a preposition are inappropriate.

5. The 19th century

By the end of the eighteenth century, more than 270 grammatical works on English had been published (Gneuss 1996: 28). This number grew dramatically during the nineteenth century, rising up to 1,930 titles listed by Gorlach (1998). At the end of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century, some important grammars were published in America, including especially the work of Webster, Murrey, Cobbett and Brown. One of the first grammars in America was Webster’s two volume *Grammatical Institute*. In the second volume, Webster (1784: 64) defines prepositions as “words set before nouns and pronouns to show their relation to other words.” He distinguishes two sorts of prepositions – separable, which can stand alone, and inseparable, which are used only in connection with other words and “commonly give a new meaning to the word” (Webster 1784: 65). According to Murray (1795: 77), “a preposition is a word set chiefly before nouns or pronouns, to connect them with other words, and to show their relation to those words.” Similarly to Webster, he divides prepositions into separable and inseparable ones. “The separable prepositions are those which may be used separate from other words […] Some of these are sometimes conjoined with other words […] The inseparable prepositions are used only in the composition of words” (Murray 1795: 77). Cobbett (1819: 41) states that prepositions “are called Prepositions from two Latin words, meaning before and place; and this name is given them because they are in most cases placed before Nouns and Pronouns.” Although the morphological part of Cobbett’s grammar deals mainly with etymological aspects of particular parts of speech, when it comes to prepositions and their history, Cobbett (1819: 74) claims that “it is useless to attempt to go into curious inquiries as to the origin of prepositions. They never change their endings; they are
always written in the same manner. Their use is the main thing to be considered.” The last American grammarian to be mentioned here is Goold Brown, who defines the preposition as “a word used to express some relation of different things or thoughts to each other, and is generally placed before a noun or a pronoun” (Brown 1823: 90). Brown’s definition is not very innovative and counts to the extralinguistically focused ones for it claims that prepositions express relations among things or ideas rather than words.

As for British grammars of the 19th century, Ian Michael (1991: 11) notes that “most grammars of English published in Britain during the nineteenth century are dull […] They are dull, especially during the second half of the century, because they impose on the language a stifling form of analysis.” Nevertheless, Murray’s grammar of 1795 became particularly popular even in the following century with many editions and abridgements published in the USA as well as in Britain. It can therefore be considered one of the most influential grammars of the nineteenth century. Another influential grammar is Nesfield’s. It defines a preposition as “a word placed before a noun or noun-equivalent to show in what relation the person or thing denoted thereby stands to something else” (Nesfield 1898/1949: 93). Nesfield introduces the term object for what will later be called prepositional complement and names nouns, pronouns, adverbs, infinitives, phrases and clauses as possible objects to a preposition. A special category distinguished in his grammar are disguised prepositions, which can be illustrated with an example of the preposition of, which can be changed into the disguised preposition o, as in four o’clock, Jack o’latern, etc., or the preposition on, being changed into a in Four sells at tenpence a pound, which, as Nesfield states, can sometimes be falsely identified as an indefinite article. In the “idiom and construction” section, Nesfield provides readers with examples of nouns, adjectives, participles, verbs and adverbs which are followed by prepositions on purely idiomatic grounds. In addition to simpler prepositions, he also distinguishes participial prepositions that are of participial or adjectival origin.

6. The 20th century

As phonology became a full-fledged field, scholars started to write phonologically focused grammars. In his A Grammar of Spoken English, Palmer includes a description of intonation patterns of English with all the example words and sentences given in phonemic transcription. As for prepositions, he focuses his attention on the fact that certain prepositions have both strong and weak forms:
He then adds that strong forms are used when the preposition is isolated, when it is stressed, when it occurs at the end of a sentence or breath group, when not followed immediately by an object or generally when followed by an unstressed pronoun. He also delineates a category of group-prepositions which comprise of adverb + preposition, adverb + noun + preposition, or preposition + noun + preposition constructions. The following section is dedicated to the function of English prepositions, which is to form (together with a following noun, noun-group or pronoun) adverbial and adjectival phrases of various kinds. As for syntax, Palmer states that the normal position of the preposition

is before the object that it governs. If the object governed by a preposition is an interrogative or a connective word, usually occurring at the beginning of the sentence, the preposition does not generally accompany it, but retains the place it would occupy if the object were not so shifted. (Palmer 1924: 199)

In the second volume of his three-volume grammar of English, Curme (1935: 87) writes that “a preposition is a word that indicates a relation between the noun or pronoun it governs and another word, which may be a verb, an adjective, or another noun or pronoun.” Curme introduces the term prepositional unit, which can be understood as a complex consisting of preposition + prepositional object. Prepositional units can be of two kinds. If the object of the preposition is a single word, the prepositional unit is a prepositional phrase. If the object of the preposition is a clause, the prepositional unit is a prepositional clause. Syntactically, Curme states that the prepositional unit can be employed as an adverbial, as an object, or as an adjective element in predicative and attributive function. Curme also mentions a special class of prepositions which he calls inflectional prepositions. As he puts it, inflectional prepositions “have often lost a good deal of their original concrete meaning and are no longer felt as prepositions, for they have developed into inflectional particles which indicate definite grammatical relations, often taking the place of old inflectional endings” (Curme 1935: 91). This means that since the nouns and adjectives lost their old inflectional endings, we often employ the preposition to to indicate the dative relation and the preposition of to indicate the genitive relation. In the case of verbs, the inflec-
tional preposition standing behind a given intransitive verb serves to convert it into a transitive one.

There are several grammars of the 20th century which do not devote a single chapter to the study of prepositions, and do not provide us with definitions either. These include Zandvoort’s Handbook of English Grammar or Jespersen’s seven volume Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles, Kruisinga and Erades’s two volume English Grammar as well as Poutsma’s Grammar of Late Modern English. Moreover, Jespersen in his Philosophy of Grammar refuses to acknowledge prepositions as a separate word class, suggesting treating them alongside with adverbs and conjunctions as a single word class of particles instead (Jespersen 1925: 87). On the other hand, Schibsbye’s Modern English Grammar with an Appendix on Semantically Related Prepositions, originally published in Danish in 1957, devotes ninety pages to the study of prepositions, with a special focus on their semantics.

The renewed attention to prepositions was a necessary consequence of the intention to write a comprehensive synchronic description of English grammar, resulting in the publication of Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik’s The Comprehensive Grammar of English Language (1985). One of the most authoritative twentieth century grammars, it was preceded and followed by less comprehensive volumes. However, for the sake of putting limits to the present paper, I will restrict my attention only to the main volume (this also applies to Huddleston and Pullum’s grammars mentioned further below). Prepositions are here generally defined as items expressing “a relation between two entities, one being that represented by the prepositional complement, the other by another part of the sentence” (Quirk et al. 1985: 657). The authors differentiate between central prepositions and marginal prepositions. Central prepositions are defined negatively as items that cannot take a that-clause, an infinitive clause, or a subjective-case form of a personal pronoun as a complement. Marginal prepositions are those which behave in many ways like prepositions, although they share features with other word classes such as verbs or adjectives, e.g. bar, barring, excepting, excluding, save, concerning etc. Morphologically, the authors make a distinction between simple and complex prepositions. Simple prepositions consist of one word only and are further subdivided according to phonological criteria into monosyllabic and polysyllabic. Complex prepositions are subdivided into two- and three-word sequences. Syntactically, the prepositional phrase is defined as a sequence of preposition + prepositional complement. The prepositional complement is most often realized by a noun phrase, a nominal wh-clause, or a nominal -ing clause. The following syntactic functions of prepositional phrases are mentioned:

a. postmodifier in a noun phrase
b. adverbial
c. complementation of a verb
d. complementation of an adjective

As far as semantics is concerned, the authors make a note that “so varied are prepositional meanings that no more than a presentation of the most notable semantic similarities and contrasts can be attempted” (Quirk et al. 1985: 573). In a very general sense, their semantic framework can be sketched as follows:

a. prepositions expressing time relations
b. prepositions expressing space relations
c. prepositions expressing the cause/purpose spectrum
d. prepositions expressing the means/agentive spectrum
e. prepositions expressing accompaniment
f. prepositions expressing support and opposition
g. other prepositional meanings

In the Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English, the first grammar entirely based on corpus data, Biber et al. (1999: 74) define prepositions as “links which introduce prepositional phrases.” In addition, they draw a distinction between free vs. bound prepositions. “Free prepositions have an independent meaning; the choice of preposition is not dependent upon any specific words in the context. In contrast, bound prepositions often have little independent meaning, and the choice of the preposition depends upon some other word (often the preceding verb)” (Biber et al. 1999: 74). Formally, they further differentiate between simple prepositions and complex prepositions, which can be further subdivided into two-word, three-word and four-word prepositions. Other sequences are considered free variations.

Another great milestone of English grammar writing was the publication of The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language by Huddleston and Pullum in 2002. In their view, prepositions can be generally defined as “a relatively closed grammatically distinct class of words whose most central members characteristically express spatial relations or serve to mark various syntactic functions and semantic roles” (Huddleston/Pullum 2002: 603). Prepositions are syntactically “heads of phrases – phrases comparable to those headed by verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs, and containing dependents of many different sorts” (Huddleston/Pullum 2002: 598). Influenced by X-bar theory, the phrase structure component in more recent versions of generative grammar, the authors assume that similarly to adjective phrases, noun phrases and verb phrases, prepositional phrases, too, can be premodified:

She died [two years after their divorce].

(Huddleston/Pullum 2002: 599)
By contrast, traditional grammars like Quirk et al. (1985) would consider this case as a separate adverbial realized by a noun phrase. Furthermore, according to Huddleston and Pullum, prepositional phrases can stand on their own even without a prepositional complement:

I haven’t seen [her since the war].

I haven’t seen her [since].

(Huddleston/Pullum 2002: 600)

Again, in Quirk et al. (1985), since from the second sentence would be considered an adverb. Huddleston and Pullum name nouns, pronouns, embedded prepositional phrases, noun phrases, adverbial phrases, adjective phrases, interrogative and declarative clauses as items which can follow a preposition. In mentioning declarative clauses, they once again diverge from the view of more traditional grammarians. Their view is slightly different in that the preposition category includes all of the subordinating conjunctions of traditional grammar, with the exception of whether, if (when equivalent to whether) and that when it introduces a subordinate clause. An absolutely new distinction made by Huddleston and Pullum is that of grammaticised vs. non-grammaticised uses of prepositions. In grammaticised use, “the preposition has no identifiable meaning independent of the grammatical construction in which it occurs” (Huddleston/Pullum 2002: 601).

He was interviewed by the police.

They were mourning the death of their king.

You look very pleased with yourself.

(Huddleston/Pullum 2002: 601)

On the other hand, in non-grammaticised use, prepositions have an identifiable meaning on their own:

I left the parcel by the back-door.

This is of little importance.

He’s with Angela.

(Huddleston/Pullum 2002: 601)

The last grammar to be mentioned here is the Oxford Modern English Grammar written by Bas Aarts and published in 2011. According to Aarts, prepositions function as the Heads of prepositional phrases. They are uninflected, usually short words which often express spatial meanings which can be literal (in the box, near the school, on the desk) or figurative (in love, beyond belief, beneath contempt). Other meanings are non-spatial and abstract, as in the phrases for your benefit, the first of July (Aarts 2011: 74).

Morphologically, Aarts accepts the traditional division into simple, compound and complex prepositions. However, he offers a relatively new
syntactic division of prepositions into transitive and intransitive ones. Intransitive prepositions do not take complements while transitive do. After Huddleston and Pullum’s grammar, Aart’s is therefore another one that does not consider prepositions elements with obligatory complementation. In this sense, it restricts the scope of the category of adverbs in favour of prepositions. Transitive prepositions are further subdivided into regular prepositions, which take noun phrases, adjective phrases, adverbial phrases, or prepositional phrases as complements, and conjunctive prepositions, which take clauses as complements. In order to achieve greater precision, Aarts further differentiates between transitive prepositions which follow their complement, which he calls postpositions, and those which take the same form as -ing participles or -ed participles, which he calls deverbal prepositions. These labels have become generally well established.

7. Conclusion

To sum up, we can distinguish the following tendencies in the history of English grammar writing with respect to the analysis of prepositions. Especially in the very first decades, there were only a few grammarians – e.g. Hume, Jonson, or Fisher – who did not assume that prepositions constituted a word class in its own right. Other grammarians acknowledged the traditional status of prepositions as a separate word class, although not all considered them important enough to deal with them in their grammars. Generally, the history of English grammar writing with regard to prepositions can be seen as one of relative stagnation, exceptionally interrupted by certain more thorough studies represented by authors like Bullokar, Miège, Maittaire, Brightland, Greenwood or Lowth. The relative negligence of prepositions culminated in the first half of the twentieth century, when most of the grammarians completely omitted sections on prepositions in their works. It was only in the second half of the twentieth century that the situation radically changed and since then, grammarians like Schibsbye, Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, Svartvik, Huddleston, Pullum and Aarts have introduced scientifically precise definitions and developed detailed and elaborate frameworks for description, which in most cases reflect contemporary developments in theoretical linguistics.
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