

Towards a syntactic typology of prepositions in French

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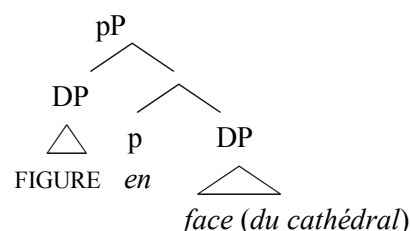
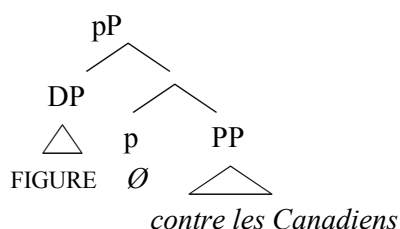
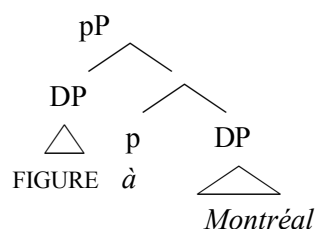
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Properties of French PPs that have long posed a challenge to formal analyses include the phenomenon of “orphan” Ps (Zribi-Hertz 1984), stacked P-elements, and behaviour straddling the lexical/functional distinction. This paper argues that a tripartite classification of prepositions in Modern French can provide a unified description of these phenomena. Adopting a decompositional approach to PPs, some prepositions are exponents of a functional light *p* (1a), similar to little *v* (Svenonius 2010, among others), while the meaning of others is composed of functional *p* and a lexical P (1b), similar to V. Finally, the prepositions having the most lexical content are built around axial nominals (Matushansky & Zwarts 2019; Real-Puigdollers 2019; Roy 2006) (1c).

1a) *à Montréal*
‘in/at Montreal’

1b) *contre les Canadiens*
‘against the Canadiens’

1c) *en face du cathédral*
‘across from/facing the cathedral’



An extended projection analysis formalizes intuitions about prepositions; more lexical content corresponds to more syntactic structure. It also distinguishes the three types of prepositional elements according to distributional tests based on their syntactic and semantic properties. For example, in stacked (2) and prepositional locutions (3), a subset of elements of the category *p* (*à*, *de*, *en*, *par*) and only such elements occupy the leftmost surface position:

(2) a. *d'après ce que disent les journaux* ‘according to what the newspapers are saying’

(3) a. *à coté de la maison* ‘beside the house’ b. *par en-dessous* ‘from underneath’

I use the licensing of null objects as a diagnostic for determining the functional/lexical status of a number of simple prepositions that remain ill-defined in other typologies (Cadiot 1997, Melis 2003, Fagard 2010, among others). Building on Roberge (2012), prepositional null arguments are licenced in much the same way as null verbal objects; just as light verbs do not license null objects, neither do light prepositions (4a). Lexical verbs licence null arguments idiosyncratically based on their semantic content and the context. Similar facts hold for lexical P (4b-c). On the other hand, complex PPs of the type shown in (1c) easily permit null objects (4d), since the latter are arguments of the axial nominal (e.g., *face*) and licenced independently by a meronym-holonym relation.

(4) a. **Montréal, j'adore aller à ___* ‘Montreal, I love going to’

b. *Cette valise, je voyage toujours avec ___*. ‘This suitcase, I always travel with it.’

c. **La Corée du Nord ? On n'a jamais été aussi proche d'une guerre avec ___*.

d. *Sais-tu où se trouve Notre-Dame? La Place d'Armes est juste en face ___*.

A cartographic approach can also account for deictic clitics (*là-dessus* ‘here above’, *ci-dessous* ‘here below’) and can offer insights into measure phrases ((*à*) *20000 lieues sous les mers* ‘20000 Leagues Under the Sea’), which pattern quite differently than their English equivalents; see Ursini & Tse (2021).

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