

Objectless Locative Prepositions in British English*

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1 Introduction

Whereas most dialects of English require the preposition in (1), British English allows **objectless locative prepositions (OLPs)**; cf. Griffiths & Sailor (2015, 2017) (G&S) on Prepositional Object Gaps (POGs).¹ The pronoun (a) or gap (b) obligatorily corefers with the subject.

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|-----|----|--|-------|------|
| (1) | a. | This film _i has monsters in it _i . | Eng | [1a] |
| | b. | This film _i has monsters in __ _i . | BrEng | [1b] |

As well as singular *it* and the preposition *in* in (1), OLPs are equally possible with plural subjects in alternation with *them* in (2), and with the preposition *on* in (3).

- (2) These boxes have papers in (them).
- (3) This box has spots on (it).

But beyond such core examples, comments in the literature plus RS's judgments indicate considerable inter-speaker variation on the circumstances under which objects of prepositions that are obligatory in other Englishes are omissible in British English.

2. Structural environments for OLPs: *have* and *with*
 3. Possible grammatical restrictions on OLPs: human? person? space and time?
 4. Range of prepositions: just *in* and *on*?
 5. Semantic restrictions: throughout-ness, non-exhaustive, *on*
 6. Analyses: vs. G&S's A-movement, vs. phonology; *therein*?
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- References
- A. Postnominal modifiers

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¹ Example numbers in [square brackets] refer to G&S's 2015 paper; in {curly brackets} to their 2017 handout. This phenomenon has also been (foot)noticed by Belvin & den Dikken (1997: 168, fn. 17) and McIntyre (2006, fn. 12).

2 Structural environments for OLPs

2.1 *have* and *with*

G&S state that pronoun omission depends on the presence of *have* or *with*. As well as verbal *have*-locatives in (1–3), we find *have got* variants in (4), and objectless adnominal *with*-locatives in (5).

(4) This book has got weird pictures in ___. {fn. 2}

(5) The film with monsters in __ was scary. [1b]

We note in (6) that this extends, perhaps unsurprisingly, to negated versions of *have (got)* (a, b) and *with*, i.e. *without* (c).

- (6) a. This film doesn't have monsters in ___.
 b. This film hasn't got monsters in ___.
 c. The film without monsters in __ was far more enjoyable.

The necessity of a *have*- or *with(out)*-frame sits nicely with analyses where “possessive” *have* “contains” *with*: Benveniste (1966), Freeze (1992), Kayne (1993), Tremblay (1996), Schütze (2001), i.a.. Thus in (7) the existential is bad (a), despite the apparent synonymy of (b) and (c).

- (7) a. *Don't watch that film—there's a monster in __! [3a]
 b. That film has a monster in it.
 c. There's a monster in that film.

We suggest that (7a) may be bad because replacing the pronoun with an empty category requires a c-commanding binder, for which *have* and *with* provide a structural position. This would also account for the badness of the examples in (8) with Saxon genitive (a) and a *because*-clause (b).

- (8) a. The film₁'s production crew are all in *(it₁). {3}
 b. I won't watch that film because a monster is in *(it)! {2b}

There are uses of *have*—not explored by G&S—that do not license omission: modal *have (got)* (9) and experiencer *have* (10). These examples might indicate a restriction to stative *have*; though they would also once again follow if omission demands a (local) binder for the gap.

(9) It's a Spielberg film—there have (got) to be monsters in *(it)!

(10) The girls had little Johnny run off on *(them).

2.2 Verbs built on *have*: *need* and *get*

We have preliminarily explored whether verbs that are arguably built on *have* act as licensors: *need* (11), which has been argued to contain possessive *have* (Harves & Kayne 2012);² and *get* (12), which has been claimed to be the inchoative form of *have* (Emonds 1994: 164, i.a.).

- (11) a. This box needs more spots on (it).
 b. This film needs more monsters in (it).
- (12) a. During the renovations, all of my furniture got heaps of dust on (it).
 b. Over the past year, the guestbook got so many rude entries in (it) that we had to throw it away.

3 Possible grammatical restrictions on OLPs

3.1 Non-human restriction?

Based on the examples in (13), G&S claim that OLPs are restricted to non-human P-objects (a); and that the restriction is syntactic, not semantic (b).

- (13) a. That guy looks like he has ten pints of beer in *(him). [28b]
 b. This party has defectors in (it). [fn. 5, (i)]

But controlling for a semantic ‘throughoutness’ restriction—discussed below in §5.1—this generalisation evaporates in (14).

- (14) [?]The poisoned spy with radioactive chemicals in (him/*it) is dying.

3.2 Person restriction?

That said, we have been unable to construct any good-sounding examples that are not third person. The examples in (15) with first (a) and second (b) person are bad without pronouns in object position.

- (15) a. The Russians poisoned me, and now I have radioactive chemicals in *(me).
 b. The Russians poisoned you, and now you have radioactive chemicals in *(you).

² These authors argue that the only way a language can have a transitive verb meaning *need* (e.g. *Mary needs a book*) is by having a transitive verb that expresses possession, i.e. *have*, and incorporating the noun meaning *need* into it.

3.3 Space and time

All our examples so far have involved spatial senses of *in* and *on*.³ G&S argue that only spatial prepositions can be OLPs. But the spatial sense is metaphorically extended in (16); and in (17) *in* is temporal, not spatial.⁴

- (16) a. Every Hitchcock movie has truly frightening moments in (it).
 b. Hitchcock films tend to have a lot of suspenseful music in (them).
- (17) a. The month of May has two bank holidays in (it).
 b. Every term has at least one manically stressfully day in (it).

4 Range of prepositions

G&S claim that all spatial prepositions license object gaps. But for RS—a speaker of Standard Southern British English—OLPs are restricted to *in* and *on*.

G&S have *across* and *under* as good (18); RS finds them very marginal (?*).

- (18) a. Rivers have bridges across. [1f]
 b. The building has strong foundations under. [cf. 14d]

G&S have speaker variation (%) for *along* and *up* (19); RS rejects them (*).

- (19) a. This road has streetlights along. [cf. 15a]
 b. That monument has stairs up. [cf. 15d]

G&S have comparative *than*, comitative *with*, ‘interspersal’ *amidst/among* and origin *from* as ungrammatical (20); RS agrees.⁵

- (20) a. A car with newer models than *(it(self)) shouldn’t be put on the market. [27a]
 b. A kangaroo with a joey with *(it) just hopped through the park. [27b]
 c. This crowd is likely to have provocateurs {amid(st)/among} *(it). [27c]
 d. London has many famous people from *(it). [27d]

³ To the extent that monsters are spatially located in movies...

⁴ Contra our abstract, where we claimed that temporals were ungrammatical—see §5.2 for the confound. Still, we have yet to come up with a temporal example with *on* that works with an object pronoun, let alone a gap; cf. the rather marginal (i).

(i) ??I don’t like Fridays with faculty meetings on them.

⁵ Though how good are these examples even with the pronoun? (16a) probably needs *itself* rather than just *it*; repetition of *with* is strange in (16b); and (16d) is slightly strange, probably equally so with *there* instead of *it*. (16c) sounds the best of the four with the pronoun. G&S classify *amidst/among* as ‘interspersal’. To the extent that interspersal is a subcategory of spatial, interspersals should license POGs on G&S’s account.

5 Semantic restrictions

Though not noted by G&S, for RS many straightforwardly spatial examples with *in* and *on* are degraded. Our understanding of the generalisations at play is preliminary...

5.1 Throughout-ness

The contents must occupy a substantial portion of their container; hence the awkwardness in (21), and the contrasts in (22). Recall also from §3.1 the contrast between (13a) and (14) re: the non-human restriction.

- (21) a. ?? A haystack with a needle in.
 b. ?? A cookie tin with crumbs in.
 c. ?? A library shelf with a book on.
 d. ?? An apartment with newlyweds in.

- (22) a. i. A jar with jellybeans in.
 ii. ?A jar with a jellybean in.
 b. i. This box has papers in.
 ii. ?This box has a sheet of paper in.

(13a) That guy looks like he has ten pints of beer in *(him). [28b]

(14) ?The poisoned spy with radioactive chemicals in (him/*it) is dying.

The contents of the space in the good examples in (21-22) are all non-specific indefinites. The examples in (23) show that specific indefinite (a) and definite (b) contents are also fine; but the throughout-ness restriction still holds.

- (23) a. This film has a monster in __ (??for two minutes).
 b. This film has Benedict Cumberbatch in __ (??for two minutes).

In (24), focal alternatives generated by *only* (a) or *(just) one* (b) seem sufficient to satisfy throughout-ness: e.g. for (a), the mug only contains dregs, as opposed to a full cup of tea.

- (24) a. My mug has ??(only) dregs in.
 b. This box has (just) one sheet of paper in.

All this said, however, recall the negated and *without* examples from (6), where a film is asserted to contain no monsters at any point, let alone throughout. Moreover, OLPs are fine in asserting absence, as in (25).

- (6) a. This film doesn't have monsters in ____.
 b. This film hasn't got monsters in ____.
 c. The film without monsters in ____ was far more enjoyable.
- (25) My jumper has a hole in ____.

5.2 Non-exhaustive

Modulo throughout-ness, there must be a part-whole relationship between the contents and the container, as in (26). OLPs are not possible where the container consists entirely of the contents, as in (27).⁶

- (26) a. This house has new plumbing in (it).
 b. 2020 will be the next year with an extra day in (it).
- (27) a. This house has 12 rooms in *(it).
 b. 2020 will be the next year with 366 days in *(it).

5.3 More on *on*

We have seen OLPs with *on*, as in (3). However, *on* is difficult to metaphorically extend, as (28) shows. The cline of contents *on* is given in (29).

- (3) This box has spots on (it).
- (28) a. A department website typically has faculty and graduate student photos on *(it).
 b. Tax forms have various sources of income and deductions on *(them).
- (29) This piece of paper has {coffee-stains/doodles/?sentences/*Shakespeare quotes} on ____.

OLPs with *on* can express attachment, as in (30), but not merely touching, as in (31). (31) would be improved if the glasses were glued to the table, as with a play prop.

- (30) All new mattresses must have tags on (them) indicating how they can be cleaned.
- (31) That table has glasses on ??(it).

⁶ In our abstract, the badness of (27b) led us to conclude that OLPs were not available with temporals; but see now the examples in (17) above, which are not confounded by exhaustivity.

6 Analyses

6.1 versus A-movement

G&S argue that OLPs are derived by A-movement, as in (32)—cf. the *there*-existential alternate: *There are monsters in this film*. For them, British English is different from other Englishes in that its spatial prepositions optionally do not assign Case. When they don't, the complement of P moves to the subject position for Case.

(32) [This film]₁ has monsters in t₁. [cf. 2]

Three problems for G&S:

1. *with*

How would G&S's A-movement analysis generalise from examples with *have* to examples with *with*, as in (33)? G&S do not offer an explicit derivation of what would be movement out of a modifying phrase to the modified head position, as in (34): the DP *a film* raises but the *with*-PP which used to contain it becomes an adjunct to the N *film* inside the DP that raised.

(33) A film with monsters in __ is playing at the local cinema.

(34) [with [[monsters] [in [DP a film]]] → [DP a [NP [NP film] [with [[monsters][in t_i]]]]]_i

2. coreference

Under G&S's account, A-movement effectively derives coreference between the subject and the gap with OLPs. But a separate mechanism will be required to derive coreference between the subject and an *overt* pronoun—termed the 'link requirement' by Belvin and den Dikken (1997). By contrast, analyses treating the gap as some sort of pronominal empty category can state the link requirement once.^{7,8}

3. Theta Criterion violation

Under G&S's account, the A-moved subject will be assigned two theta roles: one by the preposition, and a second as the external argument of *have*; or as an argument of the main verb in *with* cases.

⁷ Indeed, Belvin & den Dikken (1997: 168, fn. 17) postulate a *pro* in the complement of the preposition in (ii), following Ritter and Rosen's (1997) analysis for (iii). However, an analysis along these lines must contend with very different contrasts between overt and covert inanimate and animate pronouns. With inanimate pronouns (ii), there is no meaning difference, only a restricted distribution for covertness—as in §5; whereas with animate pronouns, there is a clear meaning difference: John is wearing a hat (iii) vs. John has a hat somewhere on his person (iii')—screwed up in his pocket, perhaps.

(ii) The table has a book on (it).

(iii) John has a hat on. (iii') John has a hat on him.

⁸ Despite the misgivings in footnote 7, treating OLPs as prepositions with silent pronominal complements has something to commend it, in that the empty position can be a bound variable, as in (iv) (see also 16a, 17b, 30).

(iv) a. Nothing at the crime scene had fingerprints on __.

b. Everything with fingerprints on __ was seized by the police.

6.2 versus phonology

OLPs are not the product of phonological reduction. Both *in* and *on* are maximally phonologically light; but other light prepositions do not license OLPs in (35): *at* (a), *by* (b), *path to* (c), *attribute to* (d), and *of* (e).

- (35) a. The FA Cup Final had 89,472 people at *(it).
 b. My house has a corner shop (right) by *(it).
 c. Towns without motorways to *(them) are rarely visited.
 d. This theory has plausibility to *(it).
 e. That boat has half of *(it) missing—it'll never sail!

Further, while a heavily reduced *it* might plausibly merge to silence with the similarly coronal final [n] of *in* and *on*, the same could not be said of *them*: recall (2).

- (2) These boxes have papers in (them).

6.3 *therein*

OLPs have acceptable paraphrases with *therein* and *thereon*. It could be that OLPs involve a silent *there*. This would be consistent with the restriction to third person pronouns from §3.2 in (36), while there is no obvious reason why A-movement should have such a restriction.

- (2') These boxes have papers ~~there~~-in.
 (3') This box has spots ~~there~~-on.
 (36) I have radioactive chemicals {in me/*therein}.

McIntyre (2006: ex. 31c) offers a *therein* gloss for German *drin* in (37) (cf. Noonan 2009, 2017).⁹

- (37) Der Wagen hat einen Motor drin.
 the car has a motor therein
 'The car has a motor in it.'

⁹ McIntyre (2006: 31a) observes that the actional sentence corresponding to (37) with objectless 'ein' (=in) is subject to interspeaker variation. This interspeaker variation regarding objectless prepositions with inanimate complements might parallel what we observe for OLPs.

(v) Fritz baute dem Wagen einen Motor ein.
 Fritz built the carDAT a motorACC in
 'Fritz installed a motor in a car.'

7 Summary

1. Objectless locative prepositions in British English
2. Structural environment: *have*, *with*, and things containing them—*need* and *get*
3. Possible grammatical restrictions on OLPs: temporal fine, human fine, but *participant
4. Range of prepositions: just *in* and *on* (RS)? or all spatial prepositions (G&S)? or somewhere in between?
5. Semantic restrictions: throughout-ness, non-exhaustive, *on*
6. Analyses: vs. G&S's A-movement and phonology; *therein*?
- A. Postnominal modifiers

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Appendix: postnominal modifiers

G&S have examples of OLPs beginning with the pseudo-prefix *be-* as fine: *beneath*, *behind* and *between*. Adding *below* and *before*, RS finds G&S's (a) examples slightly marginal. But CS shares these judgements in Canadian English, and RS notes that these examples feel rather different from OLP examples like (1). These prepositions pattern together in that they can independently function as postnominal modifiers (b). This suggests that they may be intransitive prepositions in the (a) examples, rather than OLPs.¹⁰

- (38) a. ?The table with stools beneath is dirty. [1d]
 b. The sand beneath makes building on this rock very risky.
- (39) a. ?Churches with graveyards behind are very common. [cf. 4b]
 b. The gardens behind are not open to the public.
- (40) a. ?Stop when you see two houses with an alleyway between. [15b]
 b. The alleyway between is rather narrow.
- (41) a. ?The bedroom with the kitchen below is the least desirable.
 b. The apartment below is far more spacious.
- (42) a. ?A busy week without a relaxing weekend before (it) is too much like hard work.
 b. The time before was more fun.

Similarly, we are sceptical that the bracketed material is really there syntactically when it is not there phonologically in G&S's examples in (43).

- (43) a. I drank from the bottle with the top off (of it). [30a]
 b. I drank at the pub with the most people inside (of it). [30b]
 c. It's a beautiful location with some top-quality schools [cf. 31a]
 {close by / nearby} ((to) it).
 d. That film was a just remake with most of the violence [31b]
 taken away (from it).

¹⁰ Some instances of *in* and *on* also seem to be intransitive prepositions, as in (vi) and (vii).
 (vi) Is Tim in today? (vii) There's a show on tonight.