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A Study of *of*-Phrase Constructions in English

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In this study, I attempt to characterize an *of*-phrase construction which is of the form "NP V NP *of* NP" (the *of* variant), in comparison with a construction which has the form "NP V NP *from* NP" (the *from* variant). Levin & Rappaport (1991) claim on the basis of the data in (1-2) that the *of* variant is used to express an abstract sense of removal as well as actual physical movement and that an *of*-phrase refers to "the element with respect to which the state holds" (p. 144).

- (1) a. Doug cleared dishes *from* the table.  
b. Doug cleared the table *of* dishes.
- (2) a. The judge cleared the accused *of* guilt.  
b. \*The judge cleared guilt *from* the accused.

The first claim implies that the *of* variant is distinguished from the *from* variant in terms of abstractness. However, the *from* variant can express abstract movement as well as actual physical movement. When NP V NP<sub>1</sub> *of* NP<sub>2</sub> alternates with NP V NP<sub>2</sub> *from* NP<sub>1</sub>, as in (3a, b), the *from* variant cannot express an abstract relationship between NP<sub>2</sub> and NP<sub>1</sub>, as implied by the first claim. However, when NP V NP<sub>1</sub> *of* NP<sub>2</sub> alternates with NP V NP<sub>1</sub> *from* NP<sub>2</sub>, as in (3a, c), the *from* variant can express abstract movement.

- (3) a. The court absolved the accused *man* *of* all responsibility.  
b. \*The court absolved all responsibility *from* the accused *man*.  
c. The court absolved the accused *man* *from* all responsibility.  
(cf. QALD: 5)

The acceptability of (3c) is explained in terms of the following metaphors in Lakoff (1990: 57):

- (4) a. States are bounded regions in space.  
b. Changes are movements into or out of bounded regions.

Thus in (3c), the change of state that the accused *man* underwent is metaphorically understood as a change of location. About (3b), I argue that a possessor is naturally conceptualized prior to his attributes.

I turn to consideration of the second claim. It implies that an *of*-phrase

does not convey the sense of removal by itself. If so, the sense of removal can be expressed without an *of*-phrase.

(5) The new evidence cleared the accused.

As in the case of (2a), the sense of removal is involved in (5). The removed element in (2a) is identical with that in (5). Though that element, i.e., guilt is explicit in (2a) but not in (4), both sentences express a change of state caused by the removal of guilt.

Then I argue that the second claim leads us to characterize an "NP V NP of NP" construction as expressing a change of state of NP<sub>1</sub> with respect to NP<sub>2</sub>. We observe that an "NP V NP of NP" construction is used to express the sense of absorption as well as that of removal, as in (6).

(6) Miss Lemon reminded him of two appointments. (COBUILD: 1222)

The act of reminding is metaphorically understood as absorption in terms of Reddy's (1979) "conduit metaphor." Thus in (6), his mind underwent a change of state caused by the absorption of information. Then I find out the similarity and the difference between the sense of absorption and that of removal. The two senses are similar in that they both express a change of state of things expressed by NP<sub>1</sub>, which is caused by movement of entities expressed by NP<sub>2</sub>. They differ in the direction of movement of entities expressed by NP<sub>2</sub>.

In this study, I have argued that the *of* variant is not distinguished from the *from* variant in terms of abstractness and that an "NP V NP of NP" construction is characterized as expressing a change of state of things expressed by NP<sub>1</sub> with respect to entities expressed by NP<sub>2</sub>.

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