Cognitive Grammar – Prepositions, 2018/19

**Term paper guidelines**

**The task**

Students are expected to show that they can apply the conceptual and analytical categories introduced in the course to a corpus of naturally occurring English. You will investigate one preposition/particle and attempt to classify and quantify usages and compare results with an analogous study already carried out on the same items, that by Frank Boers. You should point out to what extent your research converges with or diverges from that of Boers. To this aim, the main results of Boers’ research have been reproduced below.

**The corpus**

The corpus you will use is the Brown Corpus of American English, accessible through the Leeds University Centre for Translation. Search for “Leeds A Collection of English corpora”. Then deselect the default BNC and select Brown. As a basis for your study you will examine the first 100 instances (tokens) of the preposition/particle(s) you have chosen.

**The structure**

The paper should have a clear structure of introduction, body and conclusion. The introduction should set out the situation and the research problem. You may want to report on what reference works, such as dictionaries, reference grammars and *EPE*, have to say on the subject. You may want to report the frequency of your word with respect to others in its “family”. You may also find interesting information about the relative frequency in spoken and written corpora. In the body you should explain and justify methodological choices: the item to investigate, the decision to use a corpus (which and why?). It should present the data and the discussion of the data. It will also very likely provide selected exemplifications of points you want to make, but longer selections from the corpus should be put in an appendix. The conclusion will assess what you have discovered (and may also refer to failings or new problems to address).

**The data for comparison**

The following table brings together data reported in Frank Boers’ important work on spatial prepositions. Column 2 gives the total number of instances of the search word in his corpora. He used three, one of which is the Brown corpus. Column 3 gives the percentage of literal uses of the item in question, where literal means essentially spatial. Columns 4 and 5 break down the literal into the subcategories of static and dynamic. The next column, the fifth, shows the percentage of figurative (i.e. metaphorical) uses. The last two columns refer to the presence or absence of an explicit landmark (grammatically speaking the Object of the preposition).

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| item | **total tokens** | **literal** | static | dynamic | **figurative** | **overt LM** | **covert LM** |
| UNDER | 1,374 | 25% | 86% | 14% | 75% | 99.5% | 0.5% |
| BELOW | 260 | 51% | 84.5% | 15.5% | 49% | 77% | 23% |
| BENEATH | 121 | 91% | 84% | 16% | 9% | 94% | 6% |
| ABOVE | 538 | 48% | 95% | 5% | 52% | 81% | 9% |
| BEHIND | 549 | 67% | 80% | 20% | 33% | 90% | 10% |
| BEYOND | 332 | 30% | 10% | 90% | 70% | 20% | 80% |
| DOWN | 1,835 | 72% | 10% | 90% | 28% | 20% | 80% |
| UP | 4,009 | 35% | 9% | 91% | 65% | 6.5% | 93.5% |

Data from Frank Boers*, Spatial Prepositions and Metaphor: A Cognitive Semantic Journey along the UP-DOWN and the FRONT-BACK Dimensions* . Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1996.

The entire book has been scanned and is available at Copisteria X in via San Gallo.

**The length**

The paper should be 8-10 pages long (not counting appendices and References page).

**Formatting and citation**

Students must follow APA guidelines for formatting and citation. These can be found on the site OWL Purdue (Online Writing Lab). Nota bene: This is not an optional. If the guidelines are not followed to the letter, marks will be taken off.

**Handing in the paper**

The paper must be uploaded to the site given on the Moodle page (it will be checked for plagiarism). It must also be handed in as hard copy. Since there are too many to fit in my little mail box, they should be delivered to the “portineria” in via Santa Reparata. **The deadline is … .**

**Assessment**

The assessment of students’ work will take into consideration the following:

overall structure of the paper;

quality of analysis and discussion;

paragraph structure (don’t underestimate this!);

appropriate academic register;

range of grammatical structures and lexis;

citation and source management.