

Polish and English Prepositions in the World of Ants

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Introduction & Rationale for Choosing the Subject of Prepositions

Learning the correct use of prepositions is one of the most challenging tasks for Polish learners. Interestingly, troubles do not start until a learner decides to deepen his knowledge of the English language. The first steps of acquiring prepositions can be taken rather effortlessly. Polish and English seem to be working in similar ways. Polish prepositions have their English counterparts. For instance, when we want to say “pieniądze są **w** kieszeni” we can easily translate it into “the money is **in** the pocket.” When we, instead, want to say that “the money is **on** the table,” we simply say “pieniądze są **na** stole.” A student can quickly notice that the English preposition “on” can be used whenever a Polish expression includes the preposition “na,” “in” on the other hand can be used in place of the Polish “w.”

These first experiences with prepositions teach a student that such Polish-English overlapping takes place on many levels of language. This is the reason why Polish students would frequently say “on a university” or “in work” since in the Polish language there are expressions such as “na uniwersytecie,” i “w pracy.” Those examples reveal that even though speakers of English and Polish may conceptualize certain prepositions in similar ways, there are still plentiful differences between the way in which the two languages perceive various usages of prepositions.

How students shape their way of thinking about prepositions significantly hinges on the teacher’s understanding of this subject as well as on the approach he adopts to teach it to students. My experience of teaching prepositions was limited to the focus on the most basic meaning of prepositions; namely, the one related to physical location. I explained the subject by using various objects. A box, a table, and a candle served as the basis for showing how prepositions such as “on,” “in,” “between,” “in front of,” “behind” are used. Students changed the location of objects and used various prepositions to describe the changes in their position. It was an engaging activity. Moreover, since it focused only on the physical location, students could easily draw on their knowledge of Polish prepositions.

Obviously, teaching prepositions is not limited to the explicit instruction of time or place related prepositions. Prepositions occur everywhere. This, in turn, has an impact on teaching and learning which become very context-dependent. For instance, if students read a text on the role of sleep in their lives, they might come across the following prepositional expressions: “at night,” “pay attention to,” and “on your way back.” How can a teacher explain the usages of prepositions in those expressions? The strategy of using Polish

equivalents will not work in the above examples. The question is how to explain this subject to students to avoid providing some general rules and exceptions to them.

In order to answer the above question and be able to teach this subject it was important for me to understand it first. I decided to collect data in which prepositions were used and compare the way in which they are conceptualized in Polish and English. For my analysis I have selected a 54-minute-long documentary which describes the world of ants. I have used the English and Polish versions of the film in order to be better able to compare the way in which prepositions are used in the two languages. The title of the English version is “ANTS: Nature’s Secret Power”(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-gIx7LXcQM>.) and the Polish one is “Mrówki: Tajna Siła Natury” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ps2ib8Oq1g>.

I have chosen this type of genre because, first of all, it describes the location and positions of insects using numerous prepositions. Secondly, since insects, similarly to humans, create communities, the authors of the video use a variety of prepositions to describe such relations.

For my analysis I have selected prepositions which are most frequently presented by teachers as counterparts. These include the following: Polish “na” which is often translated into English “on,” English “at” which seems not to have a Polish counterpart, Polish “w” which is translated into “in” as well as Polish “z” which is translated into English “from” or “with.”

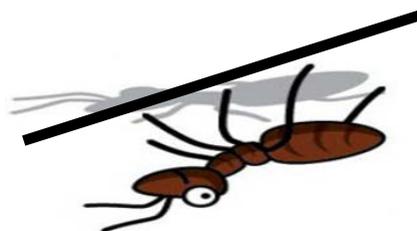
Polish	English
na	on
?	at
w	in
z	from/with

Polish Preposition “NA” and English Preposition “ON”

Literal Meaning of English and Polish preposition: small and large surfaces

The Polish preposition “na” presupposes a contact with the surface. The same meaning seems to be conveyed by the English preposition “on.” In order to better understand the nature of the contact which is taking place, it is useful to analyze expressions including the preposition “na” and “on” which occurred in the documentary.

The expression “mrówki (...) stają na szybie do góry nogami” can be translated into „ants stand upside down on glass.” We can say that the prepositions “na” and “on” connect or glue the ants’ legs to the glass. As the picture presents, there is a contact between the legs and areas of the glass.

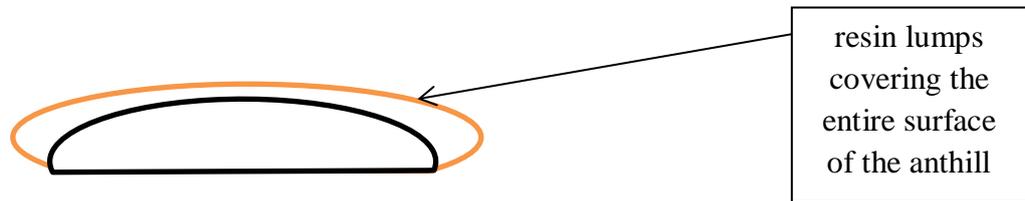


The same meaning is encompassed by the following expression “mrówki przenoszą (czerwce) na własnych głowach” (ants carry (mothers) on their own heads). There is a contact between the surface of the ants’ heads and the leaves. Similarly to the previous expression, the area of the heads where the contact is taking place is not big.

The above meaning is also expressed in expressions such as “Czy wszystkie mrówki potrafią utrzymać się na gładkiej powierzchni?” which can be translated into “Can all ants hold on the smooth surface?” or “they (bacteria) live on fungus” which can be translated into “bakterie żyją na grzybie.” Those expressions presuppose a physical contact between various objects and surfaces.

The expressions “Zawdzięczają to warstwie płynu na odnóżach.”/“The secret is a microscopic film of liquid on their feet” or “Grudki są rozmszczone na powierzchni całego mrowiska” (Resin lumps are located on the surface of the entire ant hill) present a slightly different dimension of the literal meaning of the preposition “na”/“on” That is, the contact between an object and surface takes place not only in certain points but refers to the entire surface. As the first expression above indicates, the liquid covers the entire surface of the ants’ legs; the

second one shows that resin lumps cover the entire surface of the ant hill. Importantly, both in English and in Polish, the prepositions “on” and “na” reflect the same meaning.



In the above examples, one could clearly visualize the contact between the objects and either smaller or larger parts of surfaces. The next reflection of the literal meaning of the preposition “na” illustrates the contact with significantly larger surfaces than the ones presented above. Moreover, the surfaces are conceptualized in a more general sense. For instance, the expressions “mrówki (...) zagrażają nawet stodom bydła na argentyńskiej Pampie” (ants [...] pose a threat even to cattle herds on the pampas of Argentina), “To jedno z wielu zagadkowych społeczeństw żyjących na ziemi” (It is one of many mysterious societies living on Earth) refer to regions which are mentally visualized as large open spaces. The contact between the cattle herd and the Argentinian Pampa or societies living on Earth is not understood in a very literal manner reflecting the purely physical contact between the cattle herd and the pampas or societies and the Earth. What these expressions seem to encompass is the information that the regions constitute habitats for the ant societies or the cattle herds.



The pictures show that, in fact, the preposition „on” does not connect cattle to any specific part of the Pampas. In other words, the cattle can live in the region presented in picture one, two, or three. What matters is the fact the open region of the pampas is the place where cattle herds live.

Importantly, as the above examples show, the use of the Polish preposition “na” overlaps with the use of the English preposition “on.” This is reflected in the following expressions “ants

(...) are the most efficient predators on Earth,” “they threaten the gauchos cattle on the pampas of Argentina”

All the above expressions reflect the idea of a physical contact between an object, animal, or a person and a surface which is open and not enclosed. As Polish and English expressions show, this contact is conveyed with the use of the preposition “na” and “on.” In other words, the basic literal meaning of this preposition overlaps in the two languages.

Literal meaning: Polish preposition “na” and the expression of action/movement

In Polish the preposition “na” is also used to refer to movement. For instance, in the expression “mrówki (...) przenoszą czerwce **na** te części rośliny gdzie sok jest słodszy” (ants carry their mini-bugs **to** new parts of the plant where the sap is sweeter), the preposition “na” is linked to the verb “przenoszą” which means to carry from one place to another. Whereas in English the idea of movement is conveyed with the use of the preposition “to” or “into,” in Polish the concept of movement seems to be to a certain degree subdued. What causes this effect is the use of the preposition “na” which carries rather static connotations. In other words, even though the above expression encompasses the idea of movement, what remains more significant is the contact between an object and the surface.

Other expressions reflecting the above meaning include “ludzie przeganiający bydło **na** obfitsze pastwiska” (people moving cattle **to** richer pastures), “królowa wydaje **na** świat potomstwo” (the queen brings its offspring **into** the world), “zbyt dużych (kawałków traw) nie da się znieść **na** ziemię” ([too big grass stems] cannot be carried down **to** the ground), “ze zniszczonego mrowiska **na** światło dzienne wychodzą skrzydlate płodne samice” (reproductive ants come out **into** the daylight from the destroyed anthill).

In the above English expressions the idea of movement is expressed with the prepositions “to” or “into.” In other words, when we describe a more static situation, we would say “live **on** pastures.” When we describe movement, however, we say: “move **into** pastures.” On the other hand, such change of prepositions does not take place in Polish. In both instances we would use the preposition “on” – żyć **na** pastwiskach, “przeganiać **na** pastwiska.”

Figurative meaning of the Polish preposition “na”

Contact understood as function

Another meaning of the preposition “na” refers not to the physical contact between an object or a person and a surface but to the contact understood figuratively. For instance, the expression “został profesorem na Harvardzie” (he became a Professor at Harvard) does not mean that the man is standing on the rooftop of the Harvard university. What it means, however, is that he performs the function of being a professor at Harvard. As the pictures below show, the professor can be at any place; for instance, he can be giving a lecture or he might be accompanied by students and have his picture taken. What matters is not the physical presence at a given moment in time but the fact that the professor works at a university. In other words, the preposition “na” in this context seems to be conceptualized as a function.



It is interesting to notice that to express the above meaning the Polish language uses the preposition “on” whereas English uses the preposition “at” to express this meaning.

Contact understood as goal or purpose

The preposition “on” performs yet another function. In expressions such as “**na** poznanie świata tych owadów poświęcił całe życie,” (he devoted his whole life **in order to** learn about these insects) or “mrówki działają wspólnie **na** rzecz społeczności” (ants work together **for** the benefit of society), the preposition “na” denotes a purpose or a reason for performing a certain action. That meaning presupposes a contact understood figuratively which takes place between two objects or a person and an object which are connected via the purposeful activity in which they both participate. Other expressions belonging to this group are “komory **na** odpadki” (chambers **used for** trash), “nowe miejsce **na** gniazdo (a new place **for** a nest.) As the above examples show, whereas in Polish the preposition “na” is used to express this

meaning, in English it is conveyed with the use of the preposition “for” or a connector “in order to.”

Durative meaning of the English preposition “on”

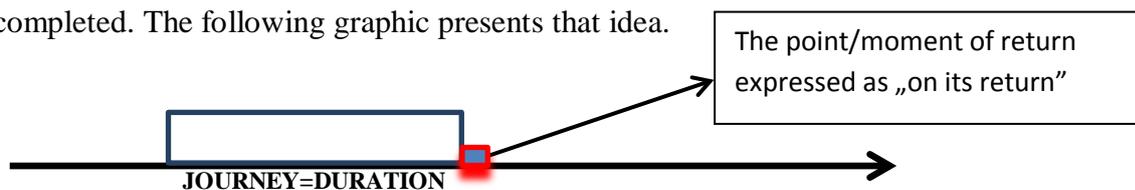
In the English documentary, two expressions included the preposition “on” but did not belong to any of the categories mentioned above. One of them was “**On** the return journey, the ant leaves a continuous line of scent.” This expression presupposes that the journey takes a period of time. It is not a specific point in time; rather, what the preposition “on” presents is duration. If one was to find another preposition reflecting a similar meaning, one could replace the preposition “on” with the preposition “during.” The expression could be presented in the following graphic:



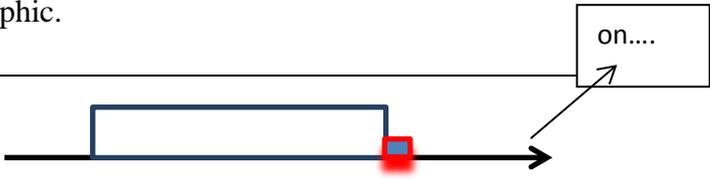
The graphic reflects the duration of the journey. It is also interesting to note that a very similar graphic could be used to represent a spatial relationship showing contact between an object and a surface.

Interestingly, the above expression in the Polish language cannot be expressed with the preposition “na.” It is, however, expressed with the preposition “podczas” (**podczas** drogi powrotnej) which can be translated into “during.” (“*during* the return journey”). The preposition “podczas” expresses duration. The expression “**on** the return journey” can also be expressed in Polish with the preposition “w” (**w** drodze powrotnej – “*in* the return journey”).

Another expression which is worth closer attention is “**On** its return, the scout recruits other ants by giving them a taste of sugar from its social stomach.” At first sight, it seems that this expression cannot be illustrated with the above graphic, because the expression “on return” does not encompass the meaning of duration. It might be conceptualized as a point. However, what is very interesting to notice is that the durative action was taking place before it was completed. The following graphic presents that idea.



In order to better understand this type of expressions, it is useful to look for similar expressions including the preposition “on.” The following expressions come from the Longman Dictionary: “Couples are presented with a bottle of wine **on their arrival** at the hotel;” “All patients are examined **on admission** to the hospital;” “On her doctor's advice Smith decided to take early retirement.” It is interesting to test whether the above examples can also be presented by the above graphic.



Expressions	<p>duration – how is it expressed in the examples below? What durative action took place before the point expressed with the prepositional phrase: “on.....”</p>
on their arrival	Before the moment of “arrival” someone was traveling in order to arrive somewhere
on admission	Before being admitted, there was a durative state/action which resulted in being admitted somewhere. The durative action could include the following: being sick (before an admission to a hospital) or going through an application process (before being admitted to a university).
on her doctor’s advice, Smith decided to take early retirement	Before making the decision to take early retirement, the person listened and analyzed the doctor’s advice

How is this prepositional phrase expressed in Polish? The expressions such as “on its return,” “on arrival,” and “on admission” cannot be expressed with the preposition “na.” In order to best reflect the meaning of the expressions, one needs to use a time adverbial and a verb in the past tense: “**Gdy** przyjechali” (When they arrived). As the example shows, in English it is expressed with the **conjunction** “when” and Simple Past.

Summary: Polish “NA” and English “ON”

As the above analysis shows, the literal meaning reflecting the physical contact between an object and a surface is expressed with the prepositions “na” in Polish and “on” in English. In other words, the teaching approach of providing the translation seems to be justified. However, as the table below shows, the Polish preposition “na” is also used to express change or movement, function or activity performed somewhere, and a goal or a purpose. These meanings are realized in English with the use of prepositions or connectors other than the preposition “na.” Furthermore, the English preposition “on” is used to express duration; meaning which cannot be expressed with the use of the Polish preposition “na.”

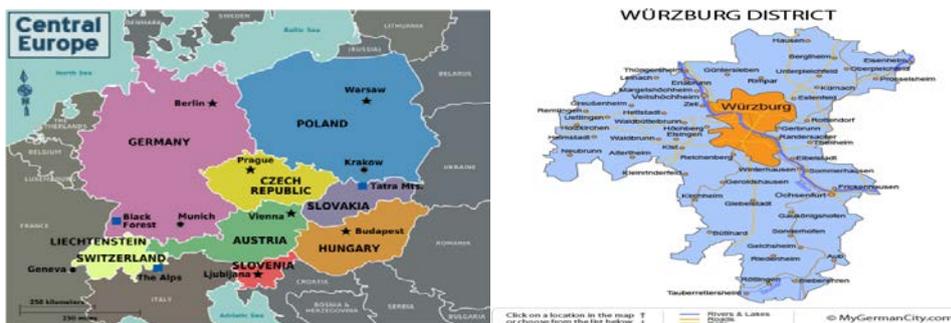
Therefore, what seems to be very important, is a teacher’s caution in equating the English “on” with the Polish “na.” Despite the fact that their basic meanings overlap, they are also used to express differing meanings in Polish and English. As a result, a teacher needs to draw students’ attention to the areas which show that “on” and “na” are not the same prepositions.

Meaning	Polish		English	
static	na	żyć na pastwiskach	on	live on pastures
change/movement	na	przeganiać na pastwiska	to/into	move to pastures
function/activity performed	na	został profesorem na Harvardzie	at	He became a professor at Harvard
goal/purpose	na	-nowe miejsce na gniazdo - na poznanie świata poświęcił całe życie	for/ in order to	- a new place for the nest - he devoted his whole life in order to/ to learn about the world
duration	podczas (during) / w (in)	podczas drogi powrotnej/w drodze powrotnej	on	on its return journey
preceding duration	Gdy + czasownik (When +verb: When they arrived)	Gdy powrócili / Gdy przyjechali	on	on return/ on arrival

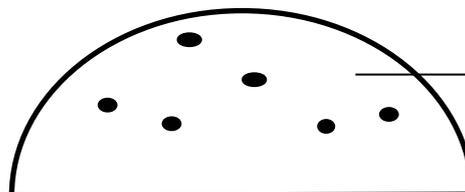
Polish Preposition “W” and English Preposition “IN”

Literal Meaning: boundaries and enclosed spaces

The Polish preposition “w” reflects the idea that an object or a person is situated in an area with clearly determined boundaries or is enclosed with a space. The first meaning is illustrated with the following examples: “Jesteśmy **w** Europie Środkowej” (We are **in** Central Europe), “został profesorem **w** Würzburgu” (he became a professor **in** Würzburg). The following pictures show that the preposition “w” is used to describe an area which has very clear borderlines established officially.



The meaning of being enclosed can be exemplified with the following expressions: “**W** mrowisku znajduje się dziesięć tysięcy larw” (**In** the anthill there are ten thousand larvae), “**w** łodydze mięsożernej rośliny mieszkają (...) mrówki” (ants live **in** the stem of the carnivorous plant), “**w** lasach deszczowych Indonezji” (**in** the rainforests of Indonesia).



larvae in the anthill

What the above examples have in common is the fact that the spaces are enclosed and surround objects, animals or people from every side. Other expressions belonging to this group include “kwas mrówkowy **w** oczach i nosie” (formic acid **in** the eyes and nose), “chwytają **w** zuwaczki” (grab **in** their jaws), “mrówki umieszczono **w** wirówce” (the ants were placed **in** the centrifuge).

The idea of being positioned within an area with clear boundaries or an enclosed space is expressed in the English language with the use of the preposition “in.” It can be exemplified with the following expressions: “Bert Hölldobler studies miniatures cities of ants **in** his laboratory,” “**in** Germany,” “assault of acid up the nose and **in** the eyes,” “ants **in** Indonesia,” “sperm is stored **in** the female’s body, **in** a sperm pocket,” “water is stored **in** the ant’s social stomach,” “**in** this acorn, I have another entire mature colony.”

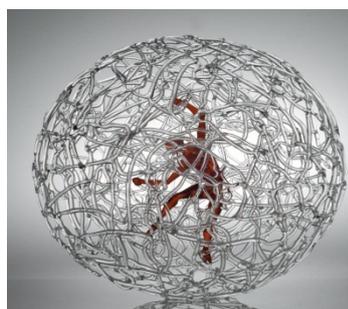
Whereas the above expressions illustrate the use of the preposition “w” to express a space with clear boundaries or an enclosed space, it is interesting to analyze the less obvious uses of the Polish preposition “w” and the English “in” which also refer to the physical location. For instance, the prepositions “w” and “in” are used in the following expressions: “**in** the background” (**w** tle), “here **in** the rainforest of Indonesia” (**w** lasach deszczowych Indonezji), “the rim of the flask is one of the slickest surfaces **in** nature,” (krawędź butelkowego liścia jest najbardziej śliską powierzchnią **w** naturze), “ants living **in** the tropics,” (mrówki żyjące **w** tropikach).

What differentiates those expressions from the ones mentioned previously is the fact that their boundaries do not seem to be extremely clear, neither do they form perfectly enclosed spaces. Nonetheless, they share certain features which make them similar to the expressions such as “in an anthill” or “in the stem.” If one looks at the pictures below, he can see that the tropics and rainforests are huge spaces covered with various types of plants such as tall trees and bushes. Even though these are not enclosed spaces because there is sky above the forests and the tropics, they are, nonetheless, conceptualized as areas which enclose much smaller objects, animals or people. Another explanation which comes to mind is that the area does not need to be closed; what seems to be the most important condition is the fact that an object or a person is surrounded by that area from every side.



Figurative meaning: “In” a situation / “W” sytuacji

In order to analyze the use of the preposition “in” in the figurative sense, it is useful to look at some examples. From the Polish version of the documentary, one learns that the “mrówka znalazła się w niebezpieczeństwie” (giant ant was **in** real danger). Although “danger” is not the same as a rainforest or an anthill which physically surround smaller objects, it can be conceptualized in a very similar manner. The following graphics show that the figurative use of “in” resembles the literal one, because in both of them, a person or an object is enclosed within a space:



man in danger/crisis



man in peace



man in ecstasy

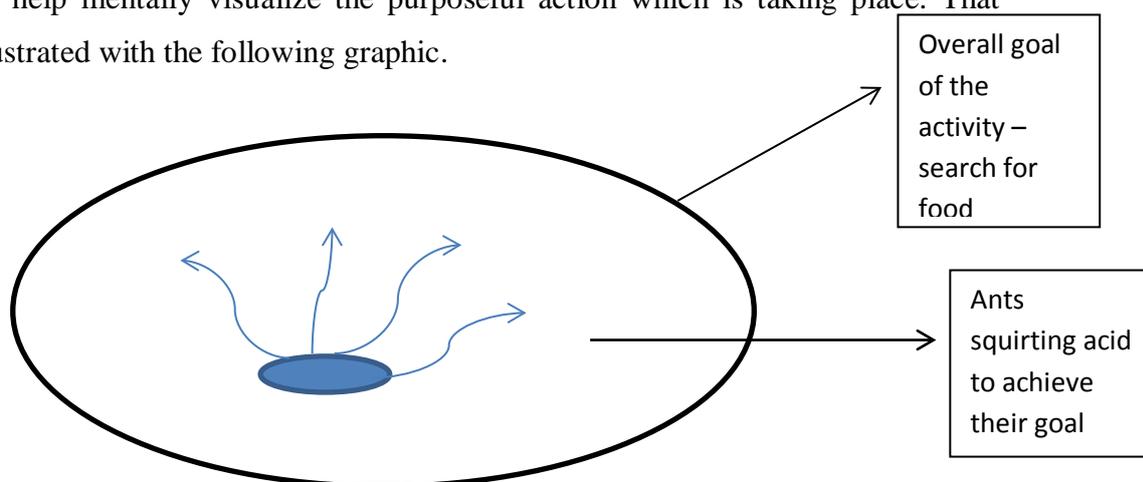
The pictures help visualize the various states within which the man finds himself; the states of being in danger, peace, or ecstasy surround the man in the sense that he is emotionally affected by them. Interestingly, both in English and Polish, that meaning is expressed with the use of the preposition “in” / “w.”

Figurative meaning: “In” / “w” expressing the purpose of an activity

Another use of the preposition “in”/ “w” can be presented in the following examples: “ants travel along orderly pathways **in search** of food” and “ants squirt formic acid **in defense** of the nest.” The same preposition is used in the Polish version of the documentary: “mrówki wędrują wyznaczonymi drogami **w poszukiwaniu** pożywienia,” “**w obronie** gniazda, robotnice wydzielają kwas mrówkowy.” The preposition “in”/“w” is linked to nouns which originally come from verbs. When linked with the preposition “in”/“w” the whole prepositional phrase expresses a purpose of an activity. These expressions could be paraphrased in the following way:

	English	Polish
Original sentence	“ants travel along orderly pathways in search of food”	“mrówki wędrują wyznaczonymi drogami w poszukiwaniu pożywienia”
Present Participle/ Imiesłów odczasownikowy	Searching for food, ants travel along orderly pathways.	Poszukując pożywienia, mrówki wędrują wyznaczonymi drogami.
Adverbial clause	When ants are searching/search for food, they travel along orderly pathways.	Kiedy mrówki poszukują pożywienia, wędrują wyznaczonymi drogami.

The paraphrases help mentally visualize the purposeful action which is taking place. That action can be illustrated with the following graphic.



The graphic shows that ants are, in a sense, enclosed within the purposeful activity which they are engaged in. In this way, this more figurative meaning is similar to the literal one.

Figurative meaning: Proficiency in/at something

The Polish preposition “w” is also used to express levels of proficiency. For instance, the documentary asks the following question: “Jak osiągnęły tak wysoką **wydajność w** zbieraniu liści?” (How have ants achieved such high **efficiency in/at** collecting leaves?); another expression which includes the preposition “w” is the following: “Dzięki **sprawności w**

gromadzeniu pożywienia zagrażają nawet stadom bydła” (Thanks to their **efficiency in/at** collecting food, they pose a threat even to cattle herds.) As the examples show, the nouns conveying the message of how proficient someone or something is, are followed by the preposition “w.” The way in which such expressions can be conceptualized is that a person is involved in an activity. Performing an action, this person exhibits proficiency or the lack thereof. This meaning can be illustrated with the following graphic:



Mrówki są wydajne
w zbieraniu liści

Graphic 1

Ants are efficient **at**

collecting leaves.

Graphic 2

Graphic 1 shows that ants are in a way enclosed within the activity of collecting leaves. It is achieved with the use of the preposition “w.” Graphic 2 seems to convey the message that ants possess the quality or the skill of being good at collecting leaves. What seems to be absent, though, is the idea of being involved in the activity of collecting leaves.

Other examples in the Polish language conveying a similar message are: **dobry w** bieganiu (**good at** running), **doświadczony w** pisaniu (experienced **in** writing), **biegły w** języku niemieckim (**proficient in** German), **słaby w** robieniu na drutach (**bad at** knitting)

As the above examples show, the preposition used in Polish to express proficiency is “w.” English, however, allows the use of the preposition “in” with some of the adjectives (experienced in / fluent in) and the preposition “at” with other adjectives (good at / bad at).

The following table summarizes the uses of the Polish preposition “z” and English prepositions “from” and “with.” It shows that in most cases their meanings overlap. The area where the correspondence seems not to be as clear is when the meaning of proficiency is expressed.

Meaning	Polish		English	
Source: idea of connection and distance	z	słodka woda z żołądka społecznego	from	taste of sugar from its social stomach
More abstracts source: idea of connection and distance	z	wyewoluowały z pradawnych os”	from	evolved from wasps
Distance; avoidance of contact	od / przed	chroniąc las przed szkodnikami	from	protecting the forests from forest pests
Close contact: literal, physical	z / noun declension (instrumental case)	ćwiczenia z dyskami	with	workout with discs
Close contact: more figurative meaning	z	mrówki tworzą przymierza z roślinami	with	farmers forming alliances with plants

English Preposition “AT”

The preposition “at” occurred in the documentary in five expressions which can be divided into three main categories. The first category would include the following examples: “His fascination led him to professorships **at Harvard University**,” “ants are back **at work** moving their herd” and “They carry the stems for fifteen meters and deposit them **at a depot**.” In order to explore the meaning of the preposition “at,” it is useful to illustrate its meaning. For instance, the first sentence means that a man became a professor at Harvard University. The preposition “at” does not mean that the man is in one of the Harvard University buildings. Although the man might be in the building, what matters is not the physical act of being in the building. What is important is the function of being a Harvard professor. Interestingly, this function is performed by the man even when he is giving a lecture at Pennsylvania State University.

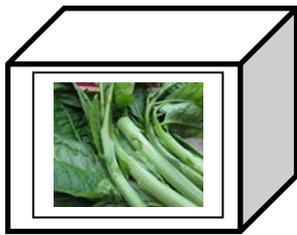


Harvard professor giving a lecture at Harvard

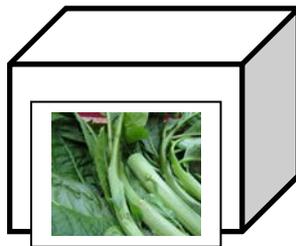


Harvard professor giving a lecture at Penn State

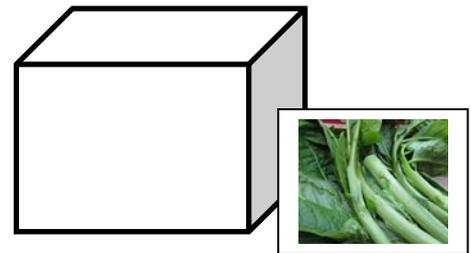
Another sentence “ants are back at work moving their herd” also shows that being at work does not have to refer to a physical presence. What is more important is the fact of working. In this case, working means moving the herd. The last example “They carry the stems for fifteen meters and deposit them at a depot” seems to be location-oriented. Yet, it appears to be less specific than the prepositions “on” or “in.” Again, what seems to be of higher importance is the fact of depositing the stems at a depot. That sentence can be illustrated with the following pictures:



stems in a depot



stems in front of a depot



stems next to a depot

Even though the location of stems is slightly different in each of the above pictures, all of them show “stems at a depot.” In other words, what matters here is the general fact that stems were deposited at a depot; it is less important whether they are inside, in front of, or next to a depot.

As the table below shows, the preposition „at” does not have a single Polish equivalent. Depending on the context, the meaning expressed by the preposition “at” is conveyed with the use of Polish prepositions “na,” “z,” “do,” or “w.”

English	Polish
His fascination led him to professorships at Harvard University	Jego fascynacja zaprowadziła go do profesury na Harvardzie (English “on”)
ants are back at work moving their herd	Mrówki są powróciły do pracy przemieszają swoje stado (English “to”)

They carry the stems for fifteen meters and deposit them at a depot.	Niosą łodygi przez piętnaście metrów i składują je w magazynie. (English “in”)
“keeps temperature, humidity, and gases, at ideal levels. ”	Utrzymuje temperaturę, wilgotność i gazy na idealnych poziomach. (English “on”)
“How good are ants at gripping smooth surfaces?”	Jak dobrze są mrówki w chwytaniu gładkich powierzchni? (English “in”)

The second category which helps to analyze the English preposition “at” includes one expression: “They are the ventilation ducts of an air conditioning system that keeps temperature, humidity, and gases, **at ideal levels.**” The prepositional phrase “at ideal levels” is not conceptualized as a horizontal surface; what matters is the information conveyed by this expression regarding the level of temperature, humidity and gases.

The third category encompasses the expression: “How **good are ants at gripping** smooth surfaces?” Here, the preposition “at” is linked to the adjective “good;” It is used to express proficiency in a specific activity.

Even though have been three categories distinguished, in fact, all of them share a common characteristic. Namely, they are not used to describe a specific location or position. What they seem to concentrate on is conveying more abstract information.

Polish Preposition “Z” and English Prepositions “FROM” and “WITH”

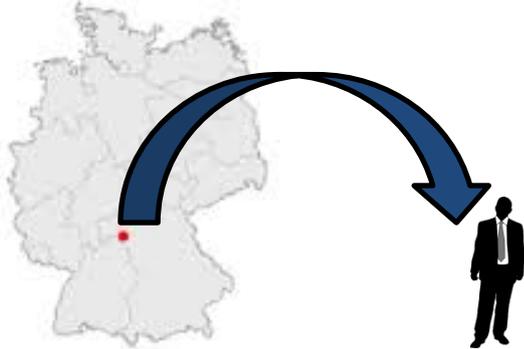
The Polish preposition “z” may convey various meanings depending on the context in which it occurs. When the preposition “z” points to a source it is expressed with the use of the preposition “from” in English. However, when “z” shows a connection it is expressed with the preposition “with.” The analysis of this group of preposition is aimed at explaining how they can be conceptualized in the two languages.

The first group of expressions with the preposition “z” includes the following examples: “zachęca inne mrówki podając im słodką **wodę z żołądka społecznego**” (the scout recruits other ants by giving them a

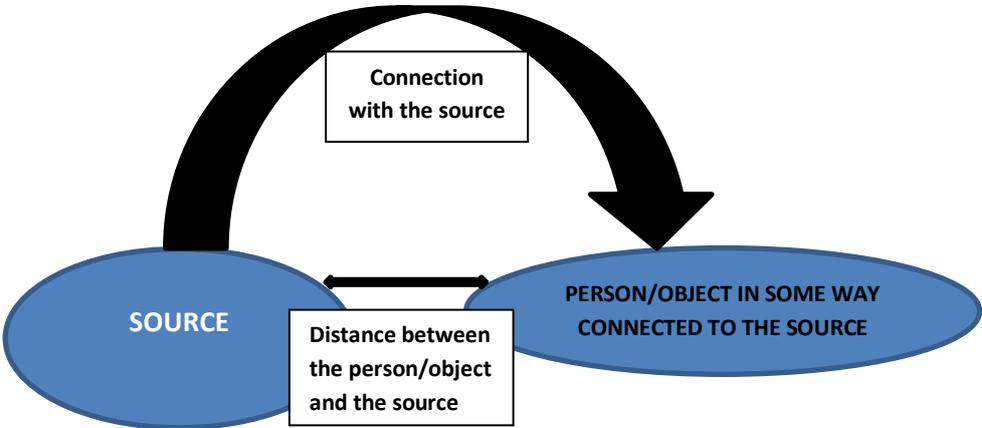


taste of **sugar from its social stomach**), “**naukowcy z Wurzburga**” (scientists **from Wurzburg**). If we were to illustrate the first expression, we could use the following picture.

We can imagine that the drop represent the social stomach. As the picture shows, it is a source that the insect is using to feed itself. How is this use related to the use of the preposition “z” in the expression “**naukowcy z Wurzburga**” (scientists from Wurzburg)? Wurzburg can be conceptualized as a source from which the scientists come. What is interesting, is that the scientists might be in a different city at the moment. However, Wurzburg remains their point of origin.

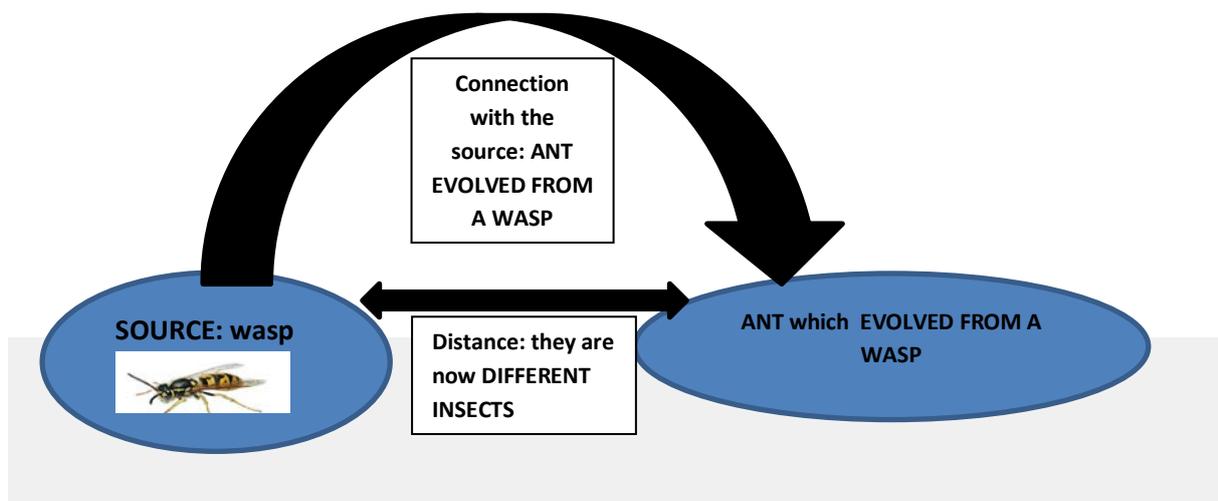


What seems to be similar about the two expressions mentioned above is the fact that the concepts of connection and distance are present in both of them. Even though, the scientists might not be in Wurzburg at the moment, that city is still their place of origin. Similarly, the ant uses the drop as a resource; therefore, it is in a way connected to it. At the same time, the idea of distance is reflected in the fact that the ant only touches the drop without being encompassed by it. If we were to provide a general graphic presenting the two examples, it could look like this:

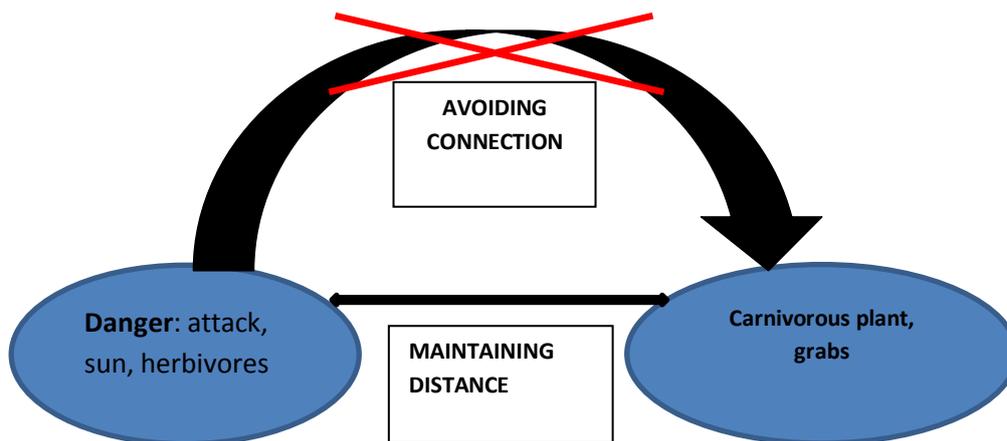


Importantly, this type of relationship is expressed with the preposition “z” in Polish and “from” in English. Other expressions which can also be represented with the above graphic include the following: “Dorośle osobniki zużywające dużo energii **czerpią ze spadzi** zawierającej cukier i witaminy” “Mała mrówka **korzysta z niesamowitych umiejętności.**” Some of the examples from the English version of the documentary include “mini-bugs **gained from better pastures,**” “Much of what we know about the evolution of ants, **comes from this fact:** the victims are perfectly preserved as the resin becomes amber.”

Another interesting expression which includes the preposition “z”/“from” is the following one: “Sto milionów lat temu **wyewoluowały z pradawnych os**” (They **evolved from wasps** more than one hundred million years ago.) It is interesting to notice that this usage of the preposition “z”/“from” also presupposes the existence of a source which, in this case, are wasps. The wasps evolved into ants. This relationship can be illustrated with a graphic which is very similar to the one provided above



It is also interesting to analyze verb phrases which seem not to fall into above category. These are: “they are really **protecting** the forests **from** forest pests,” “the ants **defend** the carnivorous plant **from** attack by herbivores,” “the workers **shield** the grabs **from** fierce tropical sun,” “They must be **stopped from** flying.” What all of these expression have in common is the idea of avoiding a contact or making sure that something does not take place. For instance, ants avoid the attack of herbivores and make sure that their food is protected from the sun. In other words, the expressions appear to express the idea of maintaining distance and avoiding contact, which can also be illustrated with a graph:



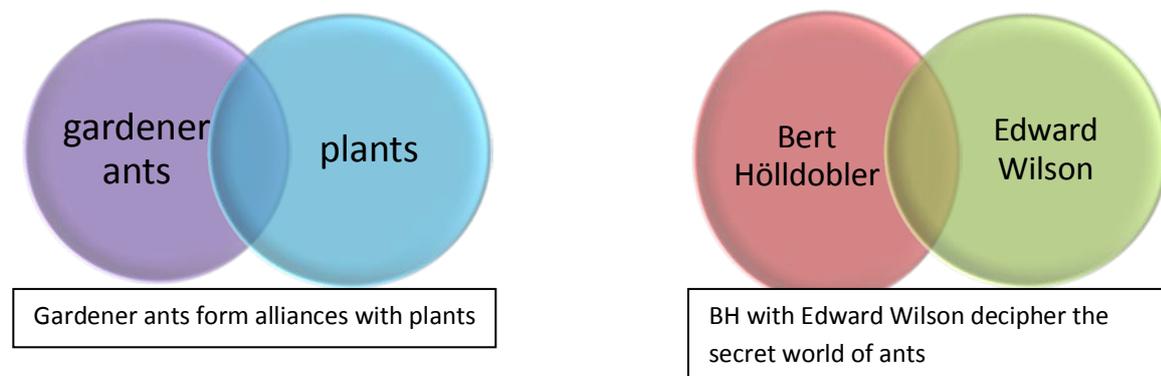
The examples presented above are not expressed in Polish with the use of the preposition “z.” They are expressed with the preposition “od” or “przed.” For instance, in Polish we would say: “Spełniają ważną funkcję chroniąc las **przed** szkodnikami,” „mrówki chronią rośliny mięsożerne przed atakiem roślinożerców. Prepositions „od” and „przed” presuppose a separation from the attack.

Another groups of expressions uses the preposition “with” to express an even closer relation. The use of the preposition with in these sentences “And after the **workout with the wax disks**, is time for the treadmill” and “Individuals **hold on with jaws and feet** putting their bodies on a great tension” presupposes a very close relationship between the objects or individuals involved in the relationship. For instance, in the first sentence, the workout is based on using wax discs and in the second example ants use their jaws and feet to hold on to a surface. The overlapping circles below reveal how close the relationship is. In a way, the prepositional expression starting with “with” modifies the antecedant by providing more information about it.



Other expressions belonging to this group include: “They will defend the brood **with** their lives,” “the new queen fertilizes her eggs **with** the sperm she has stored,” and “producing a high frequency song **with** its abdomen.” Interestingly, some of the above expressions are expressed in Polish with the use of the preposition “z.” for instance “ćwiczenia z dyskami (workout with discs). Yet, other are expressed without the use of prepositions but only through the noun declension; for example, “mrówka **wytwarzają swoim tułowiem** piosenkę o wysokiej częstotliwości” (an ant produces a high frequency song with its abdomen). The noun phrase “swoim tułowiem” (its own abdomen) is used in the instrumental case.¹

Another group of expressions using the preposition “with” includes the following examples: “tiny ants have an intimate relationship **with** the plant,” “his (male’s) only role is to **mate with the queen**,” “physical **contact with each other**,” and “some are gardeners or farmers forming **alliances with plants**.” In order to express this meaning in Polish, preposition “z” is used: “Bert Hölldobler rozszyfrowuje tajemnice mrówek razem **z Amerykaninem Edwardem Wilsonem**,” (Along **with American Edward Wilson** he has been deciphering the secret world of ants). The use of the preposition within this context expresses what or who is involved in a relationship. It can be presented with the following graphic:

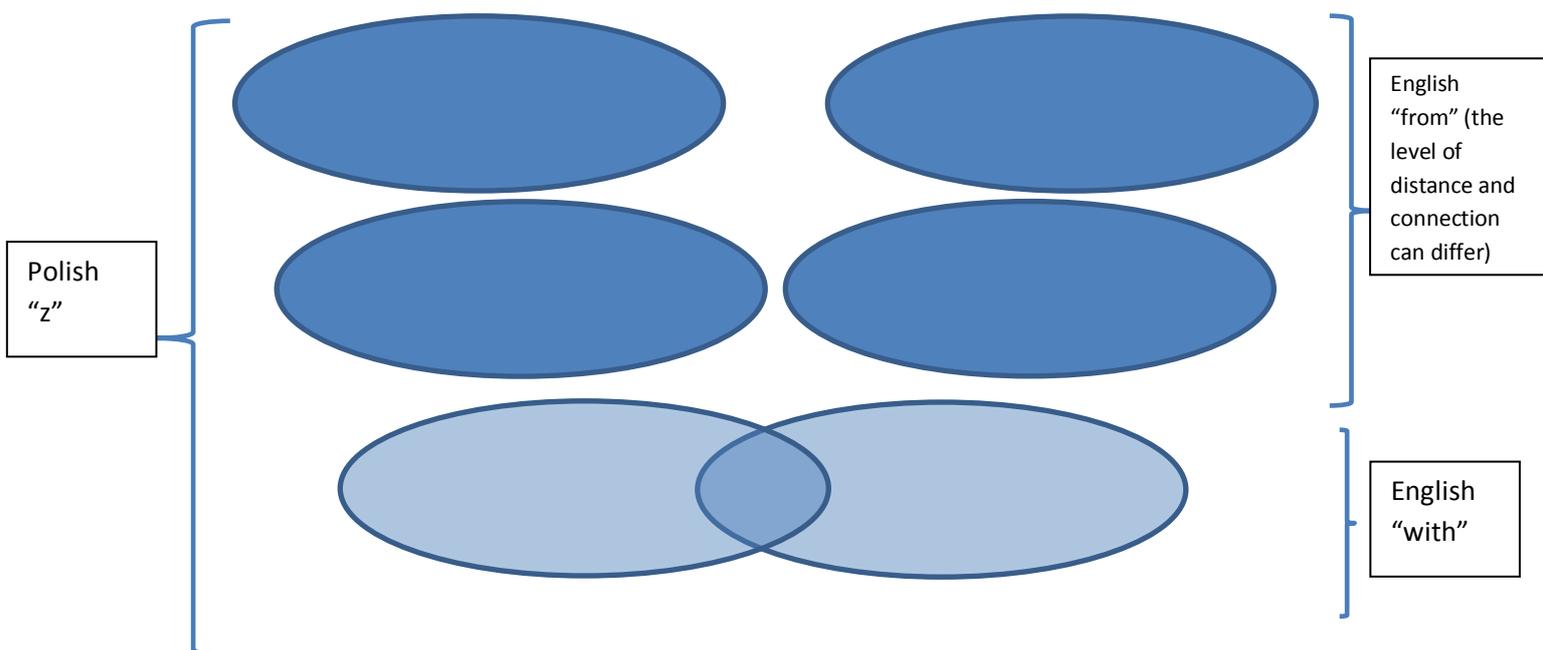


¹ There are seven noun cases in the Polish language. These include nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, instrumental, locative, and vocative case.

As the table below shows, the Polish preposition “z” conveys the both the meaning conveyed by the English preposition “from” as well as the preposition “with.”

Meaning	Polish		English	
Source: idea of connection and distance	z	słodka woda z żołądka społecznego	from	taste of sugar from its social stomach
More abstracts source: idea of connection and distance	z	wyewoluowały z pradawnych os”	from	evolved from wasps
Distance; avoidance of contact	od / przed	chroniąc las przed szkodnikami	from	protecting the forests from forest pests
Close contact: literal, physical	z / noun declension (instrumental case)	ćwiczenia z dyskami	with	workout with discs
Close contact: more figurative meaning	z	mrówki tworzą przymierza z roślinami	with	farmers forming alliances with plants

Another way in which the relation between the preposition “z” and English prepositions “from” and “with” could be conceptualized is through the use of the following graphic:



Teaching Implications

When, after reading the above analysis, a Polish teacher takes a second look at the following table he is likely to come to a conclusion that teaching English preposition is far more complex than what the table presents. “Na” is not always equivalent to “on,” and neither does “on” express the same meaning as “na” in every context.

Polish	English
na	on
?	at
w	in
z	from/with



One of the key questions that a teacher might be asking himself is how to teach prepositions without tenaciously clinging to the habit of searching for equivalents in both languages. What might prove to be an idea which is worth consideration is to teach prepositions by engaging students in a discovery of how prepositions are conceptualized in English. If students are interested in comparing the two languages, they could think of ways how the speakers of Polish mentally visualize a certain preposition in their own language. This way, without feeling the pressure of always providing quick answers which hold true in every context, teachers could involve students in discovering the meaning that a preposition conveys in a certain context. Interestingly, such a process might lead to a variety of answers, since every student’s perception and understanding might differ.

Therefore, one of the ways to show how multidimensional and context-dependent the subject of preposition is, would be to engage students in discourse-based activities. Such an approach is likely to help students realize that language is not a set of cut and dried rules which can always determine what is right and what is wrong. Language, rather, reflects human thinking which escapes simple categorizations. One of such discourse-based activities is suggested in the teaching component of this paper.

PREPOSTIONS IN ACTION

Lesson Time: 60 min

Group: teenagers/young adults: 18-19 year

Level: intermediate

Goal: To practice using prepositional phrases which are conceptualized differently in Polish and English.

In the lesson there is no explicit focus on the differences between the prepositions used in English and Polish to express the same or similar expressions. In other words, the teacher does not expect students to compare the usages of prepositions in the two languages. However, if during the lesson the teacher feels it is important to draw students' attention to address this point, the teacher will do so.

The lesson will aim to encourage students to use specific prepositional phrases such as:

- ***judge people on first impressions*** – in Polish preposition “on” (na) would never be used in such an expression; we would use: *on the basis of – na podstawie*
- ***play piano*** – in Polish the preposition “na” is used in such expressions: gra (play) na pianinie (piano)
- ***good at something*** – in Polish we use the preposition “in” in such expressions: dobry “w” (in) something

Objectives:

1. Students will be able to use prepositional phrases in a specific context
2. Students will develop their reading, listening, and speaking skills
3. Students will practice asking questions

Materials:

1. Part of a blog entry – slightly adapted for the lesson purposes. Source: website *Dear Abby...Stories and Thoughts on Life (Appendix 1)*
<http://dearabbystoriesandthoughtsoflife.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2013-06-09T18:45:00-07:00&max-results=7>
2. Questions related to the blog entry
3. Questions used by the teacher (included in the lesson plan)
4. Cards for communicative pair work activity (**Appendix 2**)

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Don't judge people 2. Sing some karaoke and..... 3. Play piano 4. If you do homework 5. You will be able to party later..... 6. Don't be afraid to ask for help 7. Even they are not good..... 	text.
10 min	<p>Practice: Students work in pairs. Each pair receives cards with written expression which include prepositions. Students take turns to take one card from the pile. Without revealing the expression, they have to think of a question which will help the other student come up with the expression which is on the card.</p> <p>For example: Student A takes one card with the expression: "worry about your grades." His task is to make question, for instance: "Why are some students sad and stressed at the end of the semester?" The other student will need to come up with the sentence: "Because they worry about their grades."</p> <p>Appendix 2</p>	In this controlled practice activity, students will be encouraged to specifically focus on the prepositional phrases. At the same time students will practice making questions.
10-12 min	<p>Practice: Focus on Writing Students are journalists working for a teenage magazine. Their boss asked them to write an article which would give teenagers advice that they could benefit from in college. Students need to use at least 5 prepositional expressions that they practiced in class. They can also modify the expressions learned in the lesson, for example: judge people on the basis of/on their merits etc.</p>	Students will have an opportunity to use the prepositional phrases in a more creative context which will require practicing their writing and speaking skills since students will need to exchange their ideas.
2 min	<p>Homework: Write a short text (7-10 sentences) in which you include prepositional expressions used in class as well as other expressions which you think could be tricky for other classmates. NEXT: take out all of these prepositions – leave blank spaces. In our next lessons, your classmates will try to fill in the blanks with prepositions.</p>	Students will practice using prepositions by creating a task for other classmates. As a result, this activity is likely to encourage students to think about some more challenging usages of prepositions.

Appendix 1:

Text for the Running Dictation Activity

Don't **judge people on** first impressions, sometimes the people who have the worst ones become your best friends. Don't be afraid to look foolish. Sing some karaoke and **play piano at an open mic**. Remember to plan your time wisely. If you do homework **at those weird times** when nothing is going on you will be able to party later without **worrying about your grades**. No one is perfect. So do not try to be. Don't be afraid to ask for **help from fellow classmates** or professors. Even they are **not good at everything** and the more open and **honest you are about** your struggles the easier it is to get on top of them before they are an issue.

In groups students answer these questions:

1. What is the text about? What type of text is it?
2. Who wrote the text? Who is it addressed to? Why do you think so?
3. Look at the advice given in the text. Can you find some similarities?
4. Which advice would be the most useful to you in your future?

Appendix 2:

judge people on first impressions	ask for help from fellow classmates
play piano	they are not good at everything
sing some karaoke at an open mic	you are open and honest about your struggles
do homework at those weird times	get on top of your problems
worry about your grades.	play guitar
they are bad at playing guitar	worry about the future