# Functional Transposition of 'ON' from a Diachronic Perspective

## Funkcinė anglų kalbos leksinio vieneto „ON" transpozicija diachroninėje perspektyvoje

**YURII KOVBASKO,** Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University, Ukraine

**Abstract**

The paper represents a distinctive attempt to trace the development of the preposition and the adverb 'on' as the initial and transposed categories. The study focuses on their evolution throughout 16 historical time spans – since 850 and up to the present time. The research is based on 7 954 Old English, 2 368 Middle English, 4 251 Early Modern English examples, which have been obtained from the Helsinki Corpus of English Texts and analyzed without applying any corpus software; 174 581 examples of Late Modern English from the Corpus of Late Modern English Texts, which have been processed by means of the Lancsbox software tool; and the statistical data on 7 118 454 examples of Present-Day English retrieved from the Corpus of Historical American English and the British National Corpus. The paper attests that 'on' is formed at the first stage (before 850) of the Old English period as the preposition and at the next stage (850–950) is transposed into the category of the adverb, which is characterized by a further slight increase in the statistics and stabilization of its correlation with the preposition 'on'. Correlation between the categories had remained stable up to the Early Modern English period, when the category of the adverb has started its sustainable growth, which is currently being observed in the English language. The paper proves that in Early Modern English the process of functional transposition is superseded by an utterly new stage of lexicalization which leads to formation of phrasal verbs.

**KEYWORDS:** functional transposition, preposition, adverb, Old English, Middle English, Early Modern English, Late Modern English.

**Introduction**

'On' is one of the primary locative and temporal lexical units in modern English. This assertion is testified by the overall frequency of its usage in discourse, where 'on' is inferior only to 'in' (see the British National Corpus). Moreover, if we cast a glance at the statistical data of the Old English period, it becomes clear that 'on' functioned as the hegemonial locative and temporal lexical unit of that time. Thus, the primary nature of 'on', its high frequency, extremely broad semantics, and a great number of possible functions have led to the fact that 'on' is characterized by the most extensive amount of not only registered but fully institutionalized meanings among all current locative and temporal lexical units. In the process of analyzing modern dictionaries (the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online (LDCEO), the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (AHDEL), the

Merriam-Webster Dictionary (MWD), the Macmillan English Dictionary (MED), the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (CALD), and the Collins English Dictionary (CED)), it is worth mentioning that the number of meanings fixed by definitions are 31 and the level of their completed institutionalization in the language is 87%. The meanings of the adverb 'on' are not so numerous amounting to 13 and the ratio of the fully institutionalized meanings is 38%. However, the overall level of institutionalization of the preposition and the adverb 'on' is very close: 97% and 92%, respectively. It is possible to assume that the adverbial meanings of 'on' have been institutionalized more rarely due to the recent emergence of new meanings or due to their low frequency and unrequested nature. But if one takes a closer look, they would notice that the majority of the meanings of the adverb 'on' were formed or transposed in Old and Middle English. It means that the low level of institutionalization is explained by the latter factor, i.e., an infrequent usage of the adverb 'on' in discourse, what is explicated by a broad semantics of the preposition, which has pervaded all potential spheres of 'on' in the language. Such overlapping in semantics and functions of the adverb and the preposition 'on', first of all, is represented by semes of locality and temporality, e.g., 'position above and supported by or in contact with', 'actual motion toward, against, or onto', etc., which are primary for the lexical unit 'on'. So, functional transposition which is based on these semes is the key to such overlapping.

Therefore, the aim of the paper is to study functional transposition of the lexical unit 'on' which has been representing the categories of the preposition and the adverb since the Old English period. The focus is on a diachronic perspective, as it is the most significant step in the algorithm of functional transposition analysis (Kovbasko, 2022). The suggested hypothesis assumes that the preposition and the adverb 'on' have been developing not as independent but interdependent lexical units, one of which emerged as a result of functional transposition from another category, i.e., one category is initial and another is transposed. In the light of the synchronic studies, the relevance of the research is explained by the necessity to strictly differentiate between word-formation processes and functional transposition, because the latter linguistic phenomenon, being underestimated and insufficiently studied, is observed in Old and Middle English as well as in Modern English lexical units. Among the most eloquent examples, including but not limited to, are the lexical units 'per' and 'atop' which have been used in the language since the 16th and 17th centuries and in the 21st century are still in the process of institutionalization and, thus, are the subjects to functional transposition. For instance, 'atop' and 'per' are defined as the prepositions by six most authoritative dictionaries, viz. the LDCEO, the AHDEL, the MWD, the MED, the CALD, and the CED; nevertheless, only two of them – the AHDEL, the MWD – recognize these lexical units as adverbs. Such examples prove that the phenomenon of functional transposition can be observed at any historical stage, because the development of the language is a continuous and dynamic process which constantly responds to various intra- and extralinguistic factors.

## Theoretical Background

The issue of the parts of speech (hereinafter PoS) overlapping is grounded on the interrelation between the crucial grammatical concepts of form, meaning and function, i.e., morphological, semantic, and syntactic parameters. Since the earliest grammar references (Allan, 2009; Kovbasko, 2020), PoS have been identified on the morphological properties of words (Robins, 1990; Ramat, 1999; Anward, 2006). The idea of semantic differentiation is somewhat limited due to the conventional distinction of notional and functional PoS, leaving prepositions, conjunctions, interjections, etc. behind the scope of any research. According to the recent linguistic trends, PoS identification is based on syntactic properties of words (Long, 1957; Hengeveld, 1992; Bhat, 1994; Hengeveld et al., 2004; Hengeveld & Lier, 2010). "By many scholars, this definition of parts of speech is regarded as the most useful one, in light of the fact that while all languages have at least a minimal syntactic organization, there exist languages that lack morphology almost entirely" (Ježek & Ramat, 2009, p. 392). These morphology-, semantics-, and syntax-oriented approaches are not mutually exclusive but represent different layers at which PoS overlapping can be observed. To find a common denominator for the approaches, I offer to address etymology, which can penetrate and bind meaning, form, and function together, what is especially important in case of overlapping between the closed word classes (prepositions and conjunctions), as well as between the closed and open word classes (prepositions, conjunctions and adverbs). The main focus is drawn towards closed-closed and closed-open word classes overlapping, because the relations between open word classes are, on the one hand, exceedingly described and studied in linguistics and, on the other hand, are always referred to as word

formation processes like conversion, (zero) derivation, etc., what is not observed in the case of closed-closed or closed-open word classes overlapping.

The proposed theory of functional transposition considerably differs from the already existing idea of transposition as the process when "a linguistic sign can change its grammatical value and yet retain its semantic value by adopting the function of a lexical category (noun, verb, adjective, adverb) to which it did not previously belong" (Bally, 1932, p. 116). What Bally (1932) says to be a semantic transposition is described by Sechehaye (1926) as the process when the representatives of the class change their primary functions, for instance, expression of adjectives, adverbs and verbs by means of a substantive form. Following this, transposition is linguistically comprehended as a substitution of one form with another by means of suppletion and desemantization. Frei (1929) provides much wider interpretation of transposition including all indirect meanings and transferred uses, shifts of syntactic and analytical structures, which brings transpositional processes at a discourse level and makes it possible to apply morphological as well as syntactical means. Within the frames of structural syntax, Tesniere (1959) analyses transpositional processes under the notion of 'translation', which shifts notional words from one grammatical category into another, i.e., transforms one class into another, admits the existence of morphological and syntactical markers in the process of translation, and confines it to the open word classes only. Sweet (1892) partially identifies transposition with derivation, comprehending the process as "the possibility to convert a word, that is, to make it another part of speech without any modification or addition, except, of course, the necessary change of inflection, etc.", and stating that "no alteration in the meaning of a word is observed, yet the use of a word as a different part of speech naturally leads to divergence in meaning" (Sweet, 1892, p. 38). Significance of morphological means, particularly affixation, is supported by Kurylowicz (1962) who defines transpositional processes within the frames of semantic and syntactic derivation and limits transposition to the notion of derivation and, consequently, to open and meaningful lexical items, which contradicts our supposition that the representatives of closed word classes are characterized by lexical meaning. Dubois (1967) analyses transpositional processes of open word classes, paying much attention to morphological means, namely affixation and conversion. Kruisinga (1932) distinguishes these processes as conversion and focuses on the lexical meaning of the unit and the ability of speakers to interpret this meaning, as a result of which either a completely new, independent word is emerging or an existing word is acquiring a new meaning, which makes it look like another part of speech. Jespersen (1932) also supports identification of conversion with derivation, in particular the use of zero suffix, which leads to a formal identity of words. Robert (2003) tends to identify conversion with zero derivation as a process of "an unmarked change of a word category" (Robert, 2003, p. 260). In the frame of cognitive approach, Lipka (1990) differentiates between zero derivation as a word formation means and transfer/semantic shift which due to metaphor and metonymy facilitates formation of new meanings.

Disputing and promoting the idea of functional transposition between closed-closed or closed-open word classes, I define it not as a word formation process or means but as a diachronic-synchronic functional process and its result, which presupposes the ability of lexical units by means of grammaticalization and lexicalization and without any morphological and/or syntactical markers acquire and realize functions inherent to other word classes but remain within its original word category.

## Methods

In this paper, an exclusive focus is on historical semantics and diachronic corpus analysis of the lexical unit 'on', because the two procedures constitute the crucial diachronic component of the algorithm of functional transposition (Kovbasko, 2022). I argue the diachronic component to be of higher relevance as compared with the synchronic one, because any language phenomenon can easily become an object of a synchronic comprehensive analysis exposing the outcome of all language changes. Transferring Darwin's words onto linguistics, "we see nothing of the slow changes in progress until the hand of time has marked the lapse of ages" (Darwin, 2002, p. 84), it becomes clear that the nature of language changes, substantiation, and detection of general tendencies in language development have frequently been eluding the linguists' field of vision.

In view of this, the conventional approach towards the periodization of the English language into Old, Middle, and Modern English is poorly applicable, as functional transposition requires a scrutinized, step-by-step examination. Therefore, in order to trace back every category shift and language change, the following detailed classification has been applied:

| 1 | –850; | 5 | 1150–1250; | 9 | 1500–1570; | 13 | 1780–1850; |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 850–950; | 6 | 1250–1350; | 10 | 1570–1640; | 14 | 1850–1920; |
| 3 | 950–1050; | 7 | 1350–1420; | 11 | 1640–1710; | 15 | 1920–1990; |
| 4 | 1050–1150; | 8 | 1420–1500; | 12 | 1710–1780; | 16 | 1990–2020; |

The first four stages (–850–1150) compose the traditional Old English (hereinafter OE) period; the next four stages (1150–1500) refer to the Middle English (hereinafter ME) period; Modern English (hereinafter ModE) is subdivided into three stages of the Early Modern English period (1500–1710), three stages of the Late Modern English period (1710–1920), and two stages of the Present-Day English period (1920–2020). The time spans range from 70 to 100 years, because they are enough for transpositional shifts to be actualized and institutionalized in the language.

The empirical material for the research has been retrieved from: (a) the Helsinki Corpus of English Texts: Diachronic and Dialectal (HCET), which covers the period from 850 and up to 1710; (b) the Corpus of Late Modern English Texts (CLMET), which comprises the texts over 1710–1920; (c) the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA), which is the source for the examples and statistical data over 1920–1990; (d) the British National Corpus (BNC) used for the analysis of the Present-Day English period (1990–2020); (e) the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), which provides some additional examples from the texts over –850–2020.

The Helsinki Corpus of English Texts: Diachronic and Dialectal is a computerized collection of extracts of continuous text covering the period from c. 750 to c. 1700, which has been analysed without any specialised automatic corpus software, i.e., manually. The major hurdles for its analysis and, consequently, the reasons which require studying each example in isolation and which do not allow applying corpus software are a specific Old English word order, when prepositions often come after their objects and the numerous spelling forms of the unit under study, cf. 'æn', 'onn', 'oon', 'onne', 'one', 'un'. Therefore, the decision was taken to use the HCET as an extensive compilation of diachronic texts, to extract from it all sentences containing the lexical unit 'on' and its possible OE and ME forms and to analyse each of them individually by tagging them as prepositions, adverbs or any other part of speech they are standing for. As a result, the diachronic corpus analysis of the period from 850 to 1710 comprises 7 954 examples of the preposition and the adverb 'on' from Old English, 2 368 examples from Middle English, and 4 251 examples from Early Modern English texts.

The Corpus of Late Modern English Texts is entirely compiled on the basis of written texts covering the period from 1710 to 1920, which is the "age of standardization or prescription stage" (Hogg & Denison, 2006, p. 284). Towards the beginning of the Late Modern English period, the written standard of the English language had probably been established and it allows contemporary linguists to analyze the then texts by means of modern corpus software. Therefore, the works from the Corpus of Late Modern English Texts have been extracted, then imported into the LancsBox corpus toolbox and analyzed by means of it. The Lancsbox software automatically annotates data with PoS tags and provides the accurate statistics on the prepositions and adverbs in question. Thereby, it has become possible to compile statistics on 174 581 examples of the lexical item 'on' in Late Modern English.

The Corpus of Historical American English and the British National Corpus, unlike the abovementioned corpora, are not just enormous collections of various samples of written and spoken language, but they provide automatic PoS tagging and general statistics on the lexical units. Thus, with the help of the COHA and the BNC, it is attainable to get statistics on 7 118 454 examples of the preposition and adverb 'on' in Present-Day English.

Finally, the statistical data, retrieved from all four corpora, have been represented in the tables for each period individually and then have been summarized in the overall graph, which shows the interwoven development of the preposition and the adverb 'on' throughout the history of the English language.

**Results and Discussion**

**Historical semantics of the preposition 'on'**

The main peculiarity of the preposition 'on' in the OE period is its application in the meanings that are currently expressed by other lexical units, such as 'in', 'to', 'of', etc., e.g.:

1   *Krist wæs on rodi* (HCET: Anonymous: The Ruthwell Cross: 8).

2   *aet ðere tide fore mine sawle & Oswlfes & Beornðryðe aet Cristes cirican & him se reogolweord on byrg gebeode foran to hwonne sio tid sie* (HCET: Anonymous: Documents 1 (HARMER 1): 44).

3   *ærest on merce cumb ðonne on grenan pytt ðonne on ðone torr æt mercecumbes æwielme ðonne on dene* (HCET: Anonymous: Documents 1 (BIRCH 451): 2).

4   *Ond mid micelre eaðmodnisse biddað ðæt wit moten bion on ðem gemanon …* (HCET: Anonymous: Documents 1 (HARMER 1): 8).

In example 1, the OE preposition 'on' is semantically identical to the modern preposition 'on'; in example 2, the OE preposition 'on' bears the same meaning as the ModE preposition 'of'; in example 3 – that of ModE 'to', and in example 4 – that of ModE 'in'. Such extended semantics of the preposition 'on' in OE contributed to a vast number of meanings represented by it.

At the first stage (–850), several locative meanings of the preposition 'on' are registered, for instance, 'in reference to (the) earth, land, ocean, sea, water, etc.; also, any part of the earth viewed as a surface' (see 5), and 'above and in contact with, above and supported by; upon' (see 6):

5   *Ðonan benioðan wuda on geryhte ut on hreodpol ðonne up on afene …* (HCET: Anonymous: Documents 1 (BIRCH 451): 20).

6   *þa he walde on galgu gistiga modig for men Buga* (HCET: Anonymous: The Ruthwell Cross: 3).

It is worth highlighting the primary use of the preposition 'on' with non-material objects in the meaning of 'indicating that on which the hands are placed in making oath; also with conscience, faith, honour, etc., as the basis of an oath or affirmation', e.g.:

7   *Heregyð bibeadeð ðem mannum ðe efter hire to londe foen, on Godes noman* (HCET: Anonymous: Documents 1 (HARMER 2): 92).

Metaphorization facilitated the use of 'on' in the meaning 'ground, basis, or reason of action, opinion', e.g.:

8   *An ðas redenne ic hit ðider selle,* (HCET: Anonymous: Documents 1 (HARMER 2): 62).

In the first half of the OE period, another meaning 'part of the body which supports one, being itself in contact with the ground' (see 9), became widespread, and this eventually regularized the meaning 'in reference to a means of conveyance' (see 10):

9   *On cneowum sittende* (OED: K. Ælfred Orosius iii. ix. §14).

10  *Ða cild ridað on hiora stafum* (OED: K. Ælfred Boethius De consolatione philosophiæ. xxxvi. §6 [5]).

Therefore, it is possible to speak of a general tendency to 'express position with reference to a place or thing' (see 11), when the place or thing is pointed at either directly or metaphorically, and this contributed to the formation of the prepositional meanings, e.g.:

11  *Þonne on ðæm norþdæle, þæt is, Asia on þaswiþran healfe* (OED: K. Ælfred Orosius i. i. §2).

The seme of locality had been represented in the meanings 'motion or direction towards a position' (see 12), or 'aspect or direction towards' (see 13), even before 850:

12  *Ðonne on ðone dic ðær Esne ðone weg fordealf ðonon of dune on ðæs wælles heafod ðonne …* (HCET: Anonymous: Documents 1 (BIRCH 451): 5).

13  *Hi ealle lociaþ mid bæm eagum on þas eorðlican ðincg* (OED: K. Ælfred Boethius De consolatione philosophiæ xxxviii. §5).

Moreover, actualization of direction became a central function, which subsequently started being represented by the preposition 'into' (see 14–15), and disappeared from the paradigm of the preposition 'on':

**14**  *Þa flowað buta suþ on þone Readan Sæ* (OED: K. Ælfred Orosius i. i. §7).

**15**  *Ure ieldran ealne þisne ymbhwyrft þises middangeardes ... on þreo todældon* (OED: K. Ælfred Orosius i. i. §1).

The identical approach was observed in reference to a number of meanings of the preposition 'on' aimed at designating the seme of locality (see 16), and the seme of manner (see 17), which are now actualized by the preposition 'in', e.g.:

**16**  *Se wæs biscop on Cantwara byrig* (OED: K. Ælfred Bæda's Ecclesiastical history. ii).

**17**  *We ongitaþ hwilum mon on oðre wisan, on oðre hine God ongit* (OED: K. Ælfred Boethius De consolatione philosophiæ xxxix: 10).

It is worth mentioning the use of the OE preposition 'on' to denote the name of the language, what later became inherent to the preposition 'in', e.g.:

**18**  *Swæ clæne hio wæs oðfeallenu on Angelcynne ðæt swiðe feawa wæron behionan Humbre ðe hiora ðeninga cuðen understondan on Englisc, oððe furðum an ærendgewrit of Lædene on Englisc areccean* (HCET: Alfred: Alfred's Preface to Cura Pastoralis: 21).

The initial usage of the preposition 'on' in this function testifies its archetypical nature in comparison with other lexical units, as a language is the primary notion of any society.

In the first half of the OE period, the preposition 'on' represented the seme of temporality, indicating 'the day of an occurrence, treated as a unit of time' (see 19), and being used for 'any time or period' (see 20):

**19**  *Þa on ðæm ilcan dæge fuhton Gallie on þa burg* (OED: K. Ælfred Orosius viii. §2).

**20**  *On huntoðe on wintra & on sumera on fiscaþe* (OED: K. Ælfred Orosius i. i: 17).

Among other meanings that were actualized in the first half of OE, it stands to mention the seme of relation 'in regard to, in reference to, with respect to, as to', which is partially grounded on metaphorical representation of direction:

**21**  *Hwæt godes magan we secgan on þa flæsclican unþeawas* (OED: K. Ælfred Boethius De consolatione philosophiæ xxxi. §1: 110).

**22**  *God ys on Dryhten georne to þenceanne* (OED: AS Psalter (Th.) cxvii: 8).

The diachronic analysis of the semantics of the preposition 'on' in the first half of the OE period attests that the abovementioned meanings and the preposition itself had appeared in the language far earlier than 850 and undoubtedly determined interrelation of the OE language and remote branches of the Indo-European family of languages.

In the second half of the OE period as well as in the ME periods, no new locative and/or temporal meanings were registered, however, the already existing meanings were specified:

**23**  *He hiene on þone nafelan ofstang* (OED: K. Ælfred Orosius iv. i. §5).

**24**  *On seint Thomas heo criden faste* (OED: Becket, T. South English Legendary I: 121).

Examples 23–24 illustrate the preposition 'on' in the meaning of 'indicating a person or thing to which action, feeling, etc. is directed', which evolved on the basis of the metaphorized seme of locality.

This function remained rather productive in Modern English, as due to the change of verbs in combination with a preposition 'on', which denoted an object or a subject of an action, new meanings have constantly been appearing, e.g.:

25 *There may be a joke about it; but if there is, it is on the Colonel, for he told me so* (OED: Harper's New monthly magazine July 271/2).

26 *After the first round they said it was 'on me'* (OED: Republican Review (Albuquerque, New Mexico) 29 July 2/4).

Therefore, the core semantics for all the meanings of the preposition 'on' derived from the Proto-Germanic language or was partially formed in the early days of the OE period. In the course of the ME and ModE periods, it is possible to observe the process of normalization and institutionalization of some meanings of the preposition 'on'.

**Historical semantics of the adverb 'on'**

The analysis of diachronic semantics of the adverb 'on' is grounded on the seme of locality represented by the meaning 'in or into the position of being in contact with, or supported by, the upper surface of something', e.g.:

27 *þa gemette he sume gerisne stowe in Hibernia mynster on to timbrenne.* (OED: K. Ælfred Bæda's Ecclesiastical history iv. iv: 274).

28 *Ðæt se se þe wunde lacnian wille geote win on.* (OED: K. Ælfred Gregory's Pastoral Care xvii: 124).

This meaning was fundamental for further development of 'on' into other adverbs and prepositions, in particular 'in', e.g.:

29 *... þæt ða yflan habbað symle hwæthwugu godes on gemong hiora yfle* (HCET: Alfred: Alfred's Boethius: 771).

Another meaning represented by the adverb 'on' was 'onward, forward, in space or time' (see 30), as well as its modification 'with onward movement or action' (see 31), which was directly related to the verb, used in combination with 'on':

30 *Ræsdon on sona* (OED: Andreas: 1336).

31 *[He] nyste butan hi sungon þone lof-sang forð on* (OED: Ælfric: Lives of Saints xxi: 236).

Thus, the diachronic analysis of the adverb 'on' showcases a limited number of meanings in comparison with the preposition. Semantic overlapping is observed on the basis of the seme of locality, represented by position and direction, and wider semantics of the preposition, which presupposed its transposition into the category of the adverb. This conclusion is also supported by other meanings, actualized by the adverb in ME, which, however, had already been institutionalized by the preposition, e.g.:

32 *He hefde brunie on* (OED: Layamon's Brut: 1553).

The meaning 'in the position of being attached to or covering any surface' (see 32), is the result of functional transposition from the category of the preposition.

It is worth noting that the development of the adverb 'on' in the ME period is characterized by its semantic dependence on verbs, e.g.:

33 *Wy þresch on, þou þro mon, þou þretez to longe* (OED: Madden, F.: Sir Gawayne and the green knight: 2300).

34 *On in Pluto name! On! & all ys owre!* (OED: Lydgate, J.: The Assembly of Gods: 1077).

It means that the adverb 'on' has not acquired any new meanings of temporality and locality since the ME period. To my mind, the reason lies in the absence of new local and/or temporal meanings in the category of the preposition, which could have been transposed and institutionalized in the category of the adverb. This fact commenced the closing of the 'transpositional window' – the most propitious span of time for functional transposition. The research shows that the process of functional transposition is rather time-constrained and is predom-

inantly feasible during 1–2 diachronic stages after the institutionalization of the meaning. If it does not happen, the probability of the subsequent functional transposition is reduced to a minimum. The lexical unit 'on' follows the identical pattern, because all local and temporal meanings of the preposition 'on' had been institutionalized before the beginning of the OE period and some of them were transposed into the category of the adverb in the first half of this period. Further possibility to transpose other primary local and/or temporal meanings of the preposition into the category of the adverb has declined, i.e., the 'transpositional window' has closed. As the preposition 'on' does not acquire new local and/or temporal meanings, there are no preconditions for the 'transpositional window' to be opened. Therefore, the adverb 'on' is developing within the frames of its own category and is focusing on representing the semes that are partially connected with locality and temporality. It became a predominant tendency of the ModE period and explains incomplete institutionalization of an array of adverbial meanings in ModE, cf.:

35   *It was getting on for two before supper was served* (OED: Truth 2 July 3/1).

36   *To be on, to be addicted or actively indulging the [drugs] habit* (OED: American Speech XIII. 188/2).

Example 35 represents the meaning 'towards something in the way of approach; approaching in space, time, or condition', which is actual, as it is partially based on the seme of temporality. In example 36, the adverb 'on' illustrates a transposed meaning of 'to be addicted to, or regularly taking, a drug or drugs'. Nevertheless, the potential to actualize this function by the preposition 'on' does not allow the adverb to finalize its institutionalization in modern language.

Thus, there are all premises to justify a considerable dependence of the adverb on the preposition 'on' in terms of locality and temporality. It can be observed in transposition of local and/or temporal meanings from the category of the preposition, whereas the category of the adverb develops within the semes predetermined by verbs. So, the diachronic corpus analysis can help to assess the level of interrelation between the categories of the preposition and the adverb 'on'.

**Diachronic corpus analysis of 'on'**

In early OE (–850), the lexical unit 'on' is the most frequently used preposition in the language. It is explained by broad semantics of 'on', which comprised the meanings that are currently expressed by other prepositions and/or adverbs, however, at the first stage of the OE period, the lexical unit 'on' functioned exclusively as the preposition, e.g.:

37   *... and suilc man sue hit awege, ðonne se hit on his sawale, nas on ðes ðe hit don het.* (HCET: Anonymous: Documents 1 (HARMER 5): 22).

38   *... ðæt hie fulgere witen ðæt hie ðiss gelęsten ðe on ðissem gewrite binemned is ðem higum to Cristes cirican,* (HCET: Anonymous: Documents 1 (HARMER 2): 93).

An extremely high frequency, an extended semantic range, and a fundamental nature of the meanings of the preposition 'on' make it possible to argue that the category of the preposition was initial for further functional transposition of 'on' into the category of the adverb. Transposition itself is observed at the next stage (850–950) of the OE period, but considering its frequency, it is possible to state that the category of the adverb was rather an exception:

39   *Is heora aldorburg nemned Lundenceaster, on ofere geseted þæs foresprecenan streames* (HCET: Anonymous: Bede's Ecclesiastical History: 9).

40   *... ðonne eow ðæt yfel on becymð ðæt ge eow ær ondredon?* (HCET: Alfred: Alfred's Cura Pastoralis: 724).

The examples showcase that the process of functional transposition of the preposition 'on' into the category of the adverb is based on its lexicalization due to the antecedent – a proper noun 'Lundenceaster' in 39 or a pronoun 'eow' in 40.

At this stage of OE, it is worth mentioning the impact of the syntactic word order in sentences, when a preposition is stranded from the object indicated by its complement, e.g.:

41   *Nim ðonne swa wuda swa wyrt, swa hwæðer swa þu wille, of þære stowe þe his eard & æþelo*
     *bið on to wexanne, & sete on ungecynde stowe him* (HCET: Alfred: Alfred's Boethius: 562).

42   *and ic þe sæde eac þæt ða wæren ungesæligran þe him unrihtlice hiora yfel forboren wære þonne*
     *þa wæren þe him heora yfel rihtlice on gewrecen wære* (HCET: Alfred: Alfred's Boethius: 843).

In the second half of the OE period, the abovementioned tendencies were preserved (see 43–44), as the majority of the meanings, which had been formed at the previous stage, were enhanced:

43   *... fer ealle gesceafta & ofer ealle creopende, ðe styriað on eorðan* (HCET: Aelfric: The Old
     Testament: 66).

44   *Sum sceal wildne fugel wloncne atemian, heafoc on honda, oþþæt seo heoroswealwe wynsum*
     *weorþeð; deþ he wyrplas on* (HCET: Anonymous: The Fortunes of Men: 74).

45   *... gyf þonne se oðer þæt geunsoðian mæge, þæt him man on secgan wolde* (HCET: Anonymous: Laws (Eleventh Century): 651).

Example 43 illustrates traditional functioning of the preposition 'on' in combination with its complement 'eorðan'; in example 44, the place, where 'wyrplas' (a 'jess') is put, is obvious and it makes it possible to lexicalize the preposition 'on' and transpose it into the adverb. Example 45 represents the structure when the preposition is stranded from its complement. In the OE period, a slight increase of the transposed category of the adverb as compared to the initial category of the preposition is observed (see **Table 1**).

**Table 1** Correlation of 'on' as the preposition and the adverb in Old English

| PoS | −850 | 850–950 | 950–1050 | 1050–1150 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Preposition | *100%* | *98.1%* | *97.3%* | *96.2%* |
| Adverb | ---- | *1.9%* | *2.7%* | *3.8%* |

The statistics in Table 1 showcases that the frequency of the adverb was growing extremely slowly and at the end of the OE period, it is not possible to testify the complete institutionalization of the adverb 'on'. Such an increase in the statistics depends on the transposed meanings of locality and temporality.

In the early ME period, this correlation is partially changing, as apart from the initial (see 46) and transposed units 'on' (see 47), the language was being filled with the adverbs 'on' which had been formed by means of lexicalization of certain OE constructions (see 48–49):

46   *Moyses feste feowertiʒ daʒe & nihte togedere þa he wæs on Synai þære dune æt Drihtines spece*
     (HCET: Anonymous: Bodley Homilies (10): 40).

47   *ant on morʒen ðanon wende to iordanen þare æ Ða heo ða ðider comen þa næfden heo nane*
     *scypæn on to farenne* (HCET: Anonymous: History of the Holy Rood-Tree: 289).

48   *þes sonde wende him forð as þe king hehte he heold on to herien his heaðne maumez wið mis-*
     *liche lakes long time of þe dei* (HCET: Anonymous: Katherine: 176).

49   *bigon to wreðen swiðe. & cleopede hire feder forð. & feng on to tellen* (HCET: Anonymous: Juliane: 89).

Examples 48–49 are indicative, because they illustrate the formation of the adverb 'on' not by means of transposition from the category of the preposition, cf. 47, but by lexicalization of the prefix 'on', which was an inseparable part of words in OE. Due to its lexicalization, the prefix 'on' is morphologically detached from the complement; however, it is still semantically associated with the latter.

In the first half of the ME period (1250–1350), new constructions with the adverb 'on' appeared in the language, e.g.:

**50** *He seide, "Ariseþ on and on...*(HCET: Anonymous: The Fox and Wolf in the Well: 281).

Moreover, the list of verbs which function in combination with the adverb 'on' was extended and new phrasal verbs were formed:

**51** *In þe southhalf þoruȝ al þe heiȝe strete : it leide on for wod* (HCET: Anonymous: The Life of St. Edmund: 396).

According to the study, the emergence of this type of constructions contributed to the frequency of the adverb 'on' in the ME period and this is additionally substantiated by the fact that the category itself did not acquire any new meanings.

In the second half of the ME period, the abovementioned tendencies were preserved and the adverb 'on' was predominantly used as a unit aimed at intensifying the meaning of the verbs they were combined with, e.g.:

**52** *Do on þan, I preie þee, fast* (HCET: Anonymous: The Cloud of Unknowing: 50).

**53** *And laiden hym on wiþ swerd and batt* (HCET: Anonymous: Kyng Alisaunder: 1374).

In example 52, the meaning of the adverb 'on', serving to intensify the verb in the ME period, can be traced back to the OE meaning 'with onward movement or action'. Similar reconstruction is possible in example 53 in which the adverb 'on' is etymologically derived from the fundamental meaning 'in/into the position of being in contact with'. Nevertheless, this meaning of the adverb 'on' has been fully institutionalized in combination with a verb 'leien', and, first of all, it intensifies the verb rather than represents the seme of locality.

In some cases, such deactualization of the fundamental semantics of locality or/and temporality leads to grammaticalization of the construction 'verb + on', which is aimed at introducing the seme of locality, e.g.:

**54** *I xall hem brynge on to my celle* (HCET: Anonymous: Ludus Coventriae: 135).

**55** *... that betokenyth the devyll that thou rodist on to the roche* (HCET: Malory, T.: Le Morte Darthur: 1050).

On the other hand, in the ME period, the preposition 'on' was developing in conformity with the tendencies enshrined in OE, e.g.:

**56** *... wentte to Westemyster on hyr fete a prosessyon to Synt Edwarde ys schryne* (HCET: Anonymous: Gregory's Chronicle: 19).

**57** *And bycause he was bore on Seynt Edmondis daye the kyng he was namyd Edmond* (HCET: Anonymous: The Life of St. Edmund: 16).

Therefore, these main development tendencies of the preposition and the adverb 'on' in the ME period are appropriately reflected in the general correlation of the categories (see **Table 2**).

**Table 2** Correlation of 'on' as the preposition and the adverb in Middle English

| PoS | 1150–1250 | 1250–1350 | 1350–1420 | 1420–1500 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Preposition | *95.7%* | *93.5%* | *95.6%* | *95%* |
| Adverb | *4.3%* | *6.5%* | *4.4%* | *5%* |

The statistics showcases a moderate growth in frequency of adverbs and stabilization of their correlation with prepositions in the ME period. It is attributed to a number of linguistic factors, for instance, lexicalization of the prefix 'on', which started functioning as an intensifier of verbs, lexicalization of the preposition 'on' that led to its transposition into the adverb. The decline in the frequency of the preposition 'on', which is observed at the stage 1250–1350, is explained by some extralinguistic factors as well, for example, it is the stage when an abrupt shift from the usage of the lexical unit 'on' to the lexical unit 'in' occurred (see **Table 4**). First of all, this shift and a reduction in frequency were observed in the category of the prepositions. Nevertheless, the growth in frequency of the adverb 'on' did not follow up an advantage and resulted in stabilization of the categories, because the preposition 'on' did

not acquire any new meanings, which could contribute to the further growth of the category of the adverb. The tendencies formed in ME were observed at the first stage of the Early ModE period, e.g.:

58  *and lete hym passe on in tellynge off his tale which endyd in thys* (HCET: Tunstall, C.: Letter (to the King): 31).

59  *Whiche sodain fere draue them to put on for ther defence such harneis as came next to hande* (HCET: More, T.: The History of King Richard III: 240).

60  *and ther they shott and thruw eges and oregns on a-gaynst a-nodur* (HCET: Machyn, H.: The Diary of Henry Machyn: 511).

Examples 59–60 represent the construction 'verb + on' where the adverb is characterized by the deactualized seme of locality and/or temporality and is aimed at intensifying the verb. Example 58 illustrates the adverb 'on' which is lexicalized by means of the antecedent.

At the next stage (1570–1640), these tendencies were considerably expanded due to the increase in number of new verbs which combined with the adverb 'on' and resulted in formation of new meanings, e.g.:

61  *They seeing her to fall into merry humors, whetted her on in merriment as much as they could* (HCET: Deloney, T.: Jack of Newbury: 372).

62  *... that it was rather carr  yed on so farr by his ministers* (HCET: Elizabeth I: Letter (to Sir Thomas Edmondes) & Letter (to Sir Robert Cecil): 99).

63  *... if they be entred and drawne on in such a manner* (HCET: Brinsley, J.: Ludus Literarius: 40).

The constructions that were targeted at deactualization of the fundamental semes of locality and/or temporality grew in popularity and contributed to a rapid growth in frequency of the adverb 'on'. Thereafter, it became a prerogative of the preposition 'on' to represent the seme of locality and/or temporality both directly (see 64), and indirectly (see 65):

64  *... or the Maid, I cannot tell which, brought in the Supper, and set it on the Table* (HCET: Anonymous: The Trial of Lady Alice Lisle: 454).

65  *That wch is now proposed on behalfe of ye Irish nation* (HCET: Anonymous: A Letter by the Commissioner of Customs (to Lord Clifford): 18).

The abovementioned tendency remained supreme throughout the Early ModE period and later influenced the correlation between the categories of the adverb and the preposition (see **Table 3**).

**Table 3** Correlation of 'on' as the preposition and the adverb in Modern English

| PoS | 1500–1570 | 1570–1640 | 1640–1710 | 1710–1780 | 1780–1850 | 1850–1920 | 1920–1990 | 1990–2020 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Preposition | 95.8% | 93.6% | 91.9% | 92.4% | 91.7% | 91.3% | 89.2% | 87.6% |
| Adverb | 4.2% | 6.4% | 8.1% | 7.6% | 8.3% | 8.7% | 10.8% | 12.4% |

The quantitative data in Table 3 showcase a gradual growth of the adverb 'on' in the language. First of all, it is observed due to deactualization of the semes of temporality and locality in the case of the preposition 'on' and combinations of the adverb with verbs in order to represent other semes.

The results of the diachronic corpus analysis of the lexical unit 'on' in the English language are displayed in **Fig. 1**

The graphic reproduction shows that the adverb and the preposition 'on' are developing in parallel to each other. It can be explained by the predominance of divergences between the categories over their similarities. The category of the preposition was characterized by the fundamental semes of locality and temporality and had been institutionalized earlier than the adverb. However, due to functional transposition the semes of locality and

temporality are represented by the adverb as well. This is exemplified by the statistical data of the OE period, which fluctuates from 1% to 4%. While the statistics of the preposition 'on' has been declining throughout the ME and ModE periods, the use of the adverb has been increasing steadily and has reached 12.4% in Present-Day English. The analysis shows that such growth is not the result of functional transposition, which took place in the OE period, because the representation rate of the semes of locality and/or temporality for the adverb 'on' in Present-Day English remains at the same level of about 4%, as it was in the OE period. The rest 8.4% of the examples describe an independent development of the adverb 'on' which was stipulated by deactualization of the semes of locality and/or temporality and has been observed since the ME period. As a result, the adverb 'on' has predominantly been functioning as a constituent of phrasal verbs, i.e., it served as an element for modifying the meaning of the verbs. The category of the preposition 'on' has not undergone any significant changes and still represents those fundamental semes of locality and temporality, as it did in the OE period.
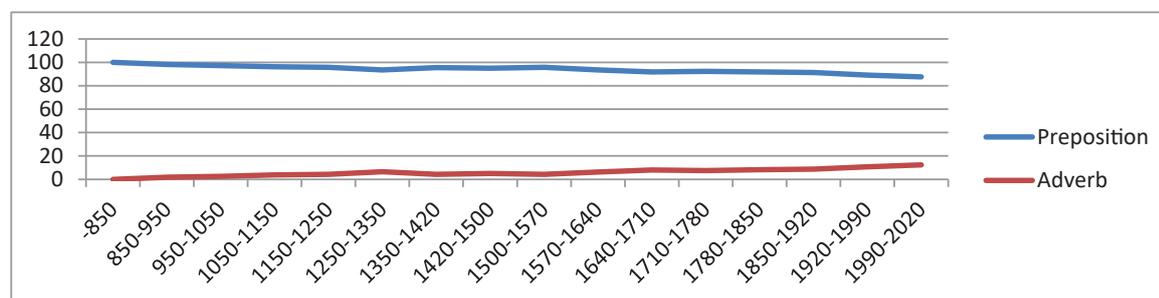


**Fig. 1** Functional transposition of 'on' in English

It is worth noting that the diachronic semantic and corpus analyses of the lexical unit 'on' demonstrate that a number of meanings, initially represented by the unit 'on', started being represented by other prepositions and/or adverbs, for instance 'in', 'of', 'to', etc. This is rather significant taking into consideration the linguistic and extralinguistic factors which stipulated the representation of the already established meanings by other lexical units. The main focus is on the lexical unit 'in', as its semantics is most closely connected with 'on'. Therefore, the statistical correlation between the lexical units 'in' and 'on' in the English language has been analyzed and displayed in **Table 4.**

**Table 4** Correlation of 'on' and 'in' in the English language

| Stage | In | On | Stage | In | On |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| −850 | 15.9% | 84.1% | 1500–1570 | 89.1% | 10.9% |
| 850–950 | 31.7% | 68.3% | 1570–1640 | 90.4% | 9.6% |
| 950–1050 | 27.1% | 72.9% | 1640–1710 | 85% | 15% |
| 1050–1150 | 13.9% | 86.1% | 1710–1780 | 81% | 19% |
| 1150–1250 | 36.8% | 63.2% | 1780–1850 | 77.2% | 22.8% |
| 1250–1350 | 82.8% | 17.2% | 1850–1920 | 75.2% | 24.8% |
| 1350–1420 | 87.5% | 12.5% | 1920–1990 | 75.9% | 24.1% |
| 1420–1500 | 89.4% | 10.6% | 1990–2020 | 70.5% | 29.5% |

**Table 4** represents a quantitative correlation between the lexical units 'in' and 'on' since the first half of the OE period. In the OE and early ME periods the frequency of the lexical unit 'on' surpassed that of 'in'. On the basis of this statistical data, I argue that the lexical unit 'on' appeared in the language earlier than 'in' and was characterized by more extended semantics. Nevertheless, elaboration of linguistic and cognitive processes in the OE period testified the necessity to extract some meanings from the category of the unit 'on' and shift them into the category of 'in'. Moreover, the diachronic semantic analysis showcases that in contrast to 'in' the lexical unit 'on' has ulti-

mately ceased its development in the early ME period. These factors contributed to the fact that since the second half of the ME period and up to the present time the frequency of 'in' has exceeded that of 'on'. It ought to be remarked that since the end of the Early Modern English period the frequency of the unit 'on' has gradually been growing. It happens due to the changes within the lexical unit 'on', as it is possible to observe the evolvement

of the adverb 'on' and institutionalization of its meanings which bear no connection to the semes of locality and temporality. As these fundamental semes do not play the leading role in the development of the adverb 'on' at the present stage, the other semes, meanings, and functions of the adverb 'on' have come to the fore, and their usage is predominantly determined by linguistic and extralinguistic factors.

## Conclusions

The research showcases that the category of the preposition 'on' was the initial PoS and lied at the core of further functional transposition. The preposition had been functioning in the language before 850 and the process of functional transposition was commenced in the middle of the Old English period, when the category of the adverb appeared. Despite the process of functional transposition, the quantitative relationship between the preposition and the adverb 'on' remained within the frame, designated during the first stage (850–950) of the Old English period; however, a slight increase in the category of the adverb was observed. The research testifies that this increase occurred due to the advancement of the initial locative and temporal semes, i.e., due to functional transposition of the preposition 'on'.

The situation changed with the beginning of the Middle English period, when the development of the adverb 'on' followed another line and was characterized by two factors, viz. lexicalization of the prefix 'on', which was inseparable in Old English, and lexicalization of the preposition 'on' in combination with certain verbs. These tendencies appeared to be so strong that they started to prevail over the process of functional transposition that was a cornerstone in the relations between adverbs and prepositions and, as a result, it doubled the statistics of the category of the adverb in the Middle English period.

The Early Modern English period was characterized by the predominance of the lexicalization process of the preposition 'on' and the subsequent use of the latter with a bigger and bigger number of verbs, forming the so called phrasal verbs. These constructions were aimed at actualizing other semes, except those of locality and temporality, whose quantitative representation by the adverb 'on' was unchanged if not degrading. This was amplified by the use of other prepositions and adverbs, e.g., 'in', 'of', 'to', etc., which took over a range of meanings that had previously been represented by 'on'. Therefore, during the subsequent historical stages this tendency has accelerated, reaching the peak in the early 21st century and tripling the overall statistics of the adverb 'on'. Representation of the initial semes of locality and temporality by the adverb 'on', however, is now at the same level as in Old English. This testifies that the process of functional transposition, which was based on the local and temporal relations and triggered the introduction of the adverb 'on', reached its plateau back in Middle English. And the parallel process of lexicalization of the initial and transposed units 'on', enhanced by the need to represent new relations, gave rise to a number of phrasal verbs. And this is the process which keeps the upper hand throughout the modern English period. The case of 'on' is just one of the numerous examples of functional transposition between the prepositions and adverbs in the English language, which must be comprehensively studied to gain the insight into the complicated relations between parts of speech.

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**Summary**

**Yurii Kovbasko. Funkcinė anglų kalbos leksinio vieneto „ON" transpozicija diachroninėje perspektyvoje**

Šiame tyrime siekiama atsekti anglų kalbos leksinio vieneto „ON" raidą. Tyrime daugiausia dėmesio skiriama abiejų kalbos dalių raidai nuo 850 m. iki dabar, apimant 16 laikotarpių (po 70–100 metų). Tyrimas pagrįstas 7954 senosios anglų kalbos pavyzdžių, 2368 viduriniosios anglų kalbos, 4251 ankstyvosios

naujosios anglų kalbos laikotarpių, kurie analizuojami rankiniu būdu, t. y. nenaudojant tekstynų analizės įrankių, 174581 vėlyvosios moderniosios anglų kalbos pavyzdžių, analizuotų naudojant specializuotą „Lancsbox" tekstynų apdorojimo programinę įrangą, taip pat statistinius duomenis apie 7 118 454 šiuolaikinės anglų kalbos pavyzdžių. Straipsnyje teigiama, kad leksinis vienetas „ON" suformuotas pirmajame senosios anglų kalbos etape (prieš 850 m.) kaip prielinksnis, o vėlesniame etape (850–950 m.) vyko jo transpozicija į prieveiksmių kategoriją. Lyginant su prielinksnio kategorija, stebimas nedidelis prieveiksmio kategorijos didėjimas ir jos stabilizavimasis. Kategorijų koreliacija išlieka stabili iki pat ankstyvosios naujosios anglų kalbos laikotarpio, kai kiekybiniai rodikliai rodo smarkų padidėjimą, kurį galima atsekti ir dabartiniame kalbos raidos etape.

**About the Author**

**YURII KOVBASKO**

Assoc. prof. dr., English Philology Department, Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University, Ukraine

**Research interests**
Historical linguistics, grammaticalization, lexicalization, functional grammar, functional semantics

**Address**
Shevchenko st. 57, 76018 Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine

**E-mail** y.kovbasko@yahoo.com

**Orcid iD**
0000-0003-4638-3900