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AN INVESTIGATION INTO  
ENGLISH COMPLEX PREPOSITIONS  
AND THEIR EQUIVALENTS IN VIETNAMESE

FIELD : THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
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M.A THESIS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
(A SUMMARY)

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**CHAPTER 1**  
**INTRODUCTION**

**1.1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

As linguistic devices, complex prepositions as stated by Quirks (1998) are particularly used in types of English formal documents, such as, administrative or legal documents, business contracts or treaties, formal speeches and so forth.

In the process of learning as well as teaching English, I normally cope with the uses of these complex prepositions in regard to some linguistic aspects as follows.

(i) In terms of semantic fields, it is really difficult to predict the meaning of some complex prepositions in English formal documents. In some cases, even with the help of contextual situations, the meanings of complex prepositions cannot be decoded; for example *in lieu of*, *in the event of*.. This is because their meanings cannot be the combined meanings of a prepositions plus a noun and a preposition as they are constructed. In other words, the meanings of complex prepositions in English formal documents are normally used idiomatically and in order to decode the semantic nuances of complex prepositions in English formal documents they should be seen in different linguistic angles.

(ii) Collocation of complex prepositions and some following technical terms in formal documents are still problematic to the researcher as well as our students. Therefore, the exploration in English and their equivalents in Vietnamese is our priority.

On the basis of these obstacles and barriers in understanding linguistic features of complex prepositions in English formal documents so as to decode these complex prepositions semantically, we have made up our minds to investigate complex prepositions in terms of semantic features and collocation in English and their equivalents in Vietnamese.

## **1.2. AIMS, OBJECTIVES**

### **1.2.1. Aims**

The research aims at investigating into complex prepositions in English and their equivalents in Vietnamese in terms of semantic features as well as collocation so as to apply in teaching and learning English.

### **1.2.2. Objectives**

- Describing semantic features of complex prepositions in English and their equivalents in Vietnamese.

- Working out the ways for the readers to identify complex prepositions in terms of semantic features their collocation in English.

- Giving some suggestions for teaching and learning of English language skills as well as translation.

## **1.3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The result of the study will assist learners and especially teachers who are interested in this research in decoding semantic features of complex prepositions in English. The score will be investigated in conformity with the concerned linguistic features in

Vietnamese so as to help them in applying in teaching, learning of English language skills as well as translation.

## **1.4. SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

In this research, we will focus on analyzing semantic features of complex prepositions in formal document in English and their equivalents in Vietnamese. Then the collocation of complex prepositions and their following nouns in English and their equivalents in Vietnamese formal documents is also notified.

## **1.5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

a. What are the semantic features of complex prepositions in English?

b. What are the semantic equivalents of English complex prepositions in Vietnamese?

c. What are collocation of complex prepositions in English?

d. What are the collocation equivalents of English complex prepositions in Vietnamese?

## **1.6. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Chapter 2- Literature Review and Theoretical Background

Chapter 3 - Methods and procedures

Chapter 4 - Findings and discussion .

Chapter 5 - Conclusions and implications

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

#### 2.1. PREVIOUS STUDIES

In terms of English references, most grammarians, such as Greenbaum and Quirk (1990), Crystal (1992), Richards Jack et al (1999) and Biber Douglas et al (1999) introduce the use as well as the meaning classification of prepositions in general, not complex prepositions in particular. Richards Jack et al [22, p.286] does not classify prepositions in different categories but he called them all, simple or complex prepositions just Richards Jack et al (1999). Huddleston & Pullum et al [16, p.617-620) emphasize the structure of complex prepositions; however they use another term as “*idiomatic and fossilised expressions headed by a preposition*”. Through these pages, these grammarians listed the most commonly used complex prepositions in English, the use of complex prepositions in accordance with grammatical functions such as the syntactic orders, the ellitical forms of complex prepositions in a sentence and so forth.

With regard to complex prepositions, especially those being structured as < preposition + (the/a) noun + Preposition>, they are stated in the book entitled “*A Student’s Grammar of English Language*” and its parent book “*The Comprehensive Grammar of English Language*” by Quirk R. et al (1990, 1985, respectively). In limit of some pages, these co-linguists only are briefly mapped out the concept and classification of complex prepositions. However, it must be, to some extent, helpful that in the section “*The*

*Semantics and Grammar of Adverbials*”, [21, p.181-187], the semantic features of some complex prepositions are mentioned here and there. Another linguist has involed in the concept of complex prepositions is Crystal (1992). Different from Quirk et al (1985,1990), Crystal [6, p.312] has not mentioned other prepositions structured as <conjunction + preposition>, such as *because of* as complex prepositions. He has only considered prepositions that are structured as <prepositions + noun + prepositions> to be complex prepositions. In conformity with complex preposition structured with their collocation, some complex prepositions are introduced here and there in the dictionary entitled “*Oxford Collocations*”. We can find complex prepositions collocates with their following nouns as the lexical items being listed alphabetically in this dictionary. However, this special dictionary only mention the collocation between complex prepositions and their following nouns or nouns equivalents. It can be asserted that we have not so far found any references or previous studies that deal with complex prepositions and their collocates used especially in formal documents.

In Vietnamese references, prepositions are usually grouped into conjunctions. This can be found in “*Ngữ Pháp Tiếng Việt*” (1983). However, Bùi Đức Tịnh [27, p.319-324) introduced some syntactic, semantic features of prepositions and prepositional phrases. He also mentioned the differences between prepositions, between verbs and adverbs in Vietnamese language. As a student who has studied English as second language, I- a native of Vietnamese language have not seen any problems in the

collocations between Vietnamese prepositions and their following nominal collocations. In this research we are interested in the collocation of Vietnamese prepositions and their following nominal equivalents because, first of all, we will deal with the translation implication then the result of this research will be beneficial references to learners from English speaking countries or those who can speak English prefer studying Vietnamese language. In Vietnamese references, prepositions and prepositional phrases are discussed generally in most grammar books. To my best knowledge, up to now, there have been no any materials related to the study of prepositions in formal documents, or prepositions collocates with their following nouns.

On the basis of the previous studies, we can come to conclusion that the investigation of complex prepositions in the formal documents particularly in terms of semantics, and in collocation with their following nominal items have not been discussed so far in both languages, English and Vietnamese. It is the reason why we make up our mind to deal with the research entitled **An Investigation into English Complex Prepositions and Their Equivalents in Vietnamese** in linguistic domains such as semantic domains and collocation.

## **2.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

As we have just stated in the previous studies, most grammarians introduce complex prepositions in prepositions in general. Among them, Quirk R. et al (1985, 1998) and Biber Douglas et al (1999) have discussed complex prepositions concerning the notion, classification in more detail. In the sections

mentioned below we will mainly lay a foundation on these grammarians' theory in order to solve the problems in our dissertation.

### **2.2.1. Complex Prepositions**

#### **2.2.1.1. Definitions of Complex Prepositions**

As stated by Richards Jack C et al [22, p.286], preposition is a word used with *nouns*, *pronouns* and *gerunds* to link them grammatically to other words. In English, too, there are groups of words (e.g. *in front of*, *owing to*) that can function like simple-word prepositions.

Greenbaum & Quirk (1998) state that there are two main types of complex prepositions: (i) a simple preposition preceded by a particle, adjective, adverb or conjunction, as with *owing to*, *devoid of*, *away from*, *because of*, (ii) a simple preposition followed by a noun and then a further simple preposition, as with *in charge of*, *by means of*, *at variance with*, *as a result of*.

Otherwise, complex prepositions, as defined by Crystal (1992), can be structurally analyzed as a sequence of two prepositions surrounding a noun, the whole construction then being used with a following noun phrase; for example *in accordance with your instructions*.

#### **2.2.1.2. Differences between Simple and Complex Prepositions**

##### **2.2.1.3. Differences of Complex Prepositions and Conjunctions**

##### **2.2.1.4 Differences of Complex Prepositions and Disjuncts**

## 2.2.2. Semantic Classification of Prepositions and Complex Prepositions

### 2.2.2.1. Prepositions and Complex Prepositions Denoting Reason

### 2.2.2.2. Prepositions and Complex Prepositions Denoting purpose

### 2.2.2.3. Prepositions and Complex Prepositions Denoting means

### 2.2.2.4. Prepositions and Complex Prepositions Denoting Concession

### 2.2.2.5. Prepositions and Complex Prepositions Denoting reference

## 2.2.3. View Points of Prepositions in Vietnamese

In Vietnamese language, there are some different points of view of prepositions. Some grammarians name prepositions as linking words that comprise prepositions and conjunctions Tran Ngoc Them, (1985); Diep Quang Ban [29, p.132-144]. The reason why prepositions and conjunctions are categorized in the same word class because it is difficult to distinguish prepositions from conjunctions in some circumstances in Vietnamese Nguyen Van Thanh [32, p.662]. However, other grammarians such as Bui Duc Tinh [27, p.319-324] consider prepositions as typical syntactic category in Vietnamese. Syntactically, Nguyen Van Thanh [32, p.660-727) states that “Prepositions is used to link with noun, pronoun and numerals ”. He also confirms that *conjunctions* should be considered at sentence levels, especially at complex sentences. It is really problematic in

order to identify the syntactic categories that follow Vietnamese prepositions. For examples, the Vietnamese prepositional phrase ‘*de thay the cho*’ is constructed as ‘preposition plus a verb’. It is the complexity of the syntactic categories in Vietnamese collocate with the preceding prepositions in Vietnamese that we made up our mind to deal with the meaning of the collocation between English complex prepositions with their following collocates and their equivalents in Vietnamese. The syntactic of English complex prepositions and their following collocates as well as their equivalents in Vietnamese are not taken into consideration in this thesis and will be discussed for further studies.

## 2.2.4. Collocation

### 2.2.4.1. Definition of Collocation

According to Crystal [6, p.71] Collocation is the habitual co-occurrence of individual lexical items, such as *auspicious* and *occasion*. The potential of items to collocate is called their *collocability*. Another notion is that collocation is a combination of words in a language, that happens very often and more frequently than would happen by chance: “*Resounding success*” and “*Crying shame*” are English collocation, Hornby [2, p.281].

Similarly, Richards [22, p.62] assert that collocation is the way in which words are used together regularly. Collocation refers to the restrictions on how words can be used together, for example which prepositions are used with particular verbs, or which verbs and nouns are used together. For example, in English the verb *perform* is used with *operation*, but not with *discussion*:

E.g. The doctor *performed* the *operation*.

The committee *performed* a *discussion*.

#### **2.2.4.2. The importance of Collocation**

With respect to the paramountancy of collocation, Runcie Moria [19, p.vii] states that collocation runs through the whole of the English language. No piece of natural spoken or written English is totally free of collocation. For the student, choosing the right collocation will make his speech and writing sound much more natural, more native-speaker-like, even when basic intelligibility does not seem to be at issue. A student who utters *strong rain* may make himself understood, but possibly not without provoking a smile or a correction, which may or may not matter. He will certainly be marked down for it in an exam.

The writer also emphasizes that perhaps even more importantly than the foregoing ideas, language that is collocationally rich is also more precise. This is because most single words in the English language – especially the more common words – embrace a whole range of meanings, some quite distinct, and some that shade into each other by degrees. The precise meaning in any context is determined by that context: by the words that surround and combine with the core word by collocation. A student who chooses the best collocation will express himself much more clearly and be able to convey not just a general meaning, but something quite precise. Compare, for example, the following two sentences:

E.g. This is a good book and contains a lot of interesting details.

This is fascinating book and contains a wealth of historical details.

#### **2.2.4.3. Types of Collocation combination**

### **2.2.5. Formal Documents**

#### **2.2.5.1. Definition of Formal Documents**

A formal document is a document adhering to traditional standards of correctness. A formal document is usually sent when an entity is communicating with other external entities.

[59]

#### **2.2.5.2. Differences between of Formal Documents and Informal Documents**

Formal documents are different from informal ones in the way that a informal document is a document that is not officially recognized or controlled. Eg. When an employee sends a weekly status to his direct manager. Usually informal documents are common within the same entity.

[59]

In terms of the use of complex prepositions in formal document, according to Quirk et al [21, p.304] stated that “*Legal English is notable for complex prepositions, the following being among those found mainly in legalistic or bureauratic usage: in case of, in default of, in lieu of, on pain of, in respect of*”

### 2.2.6. Concepts of Vietnamese Equivalentents and their Equivalentents in Vietnamese

In our thesis, we include two concepts that are related to our research such as “Vietnamese Equivalent” (of English complex prepositions), and “their Equivalentents in Vietnamese”. *Vietnamese Equivalentent* means that the meaning of a Vietnamese preposition that are equivalent to that of an English complex preposition as stated in the Oxford Learner’s Dictionary [2, p.493] “*something equal in value, amount, meaning, importance, etc*”. And “their Equivalentents in Vietnamese” implies that *the equivalent uses or forms of English complex prepositions in terms of linguistic features, such as semantic, collocation*. This is because, as having been stated, there exist no complex prepositions in Vietnamese. Also, according to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary [2, p493] “Equivalent” means that *a thing, amount, word, etc. that is equivalent to sth else*.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

### 3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

Qualitative approach and description were used as main research methods in the study. The data collected were counted qualitatively analyzed. The descriptive method is used to describe and analyze the semantic features and collocations of complex prepositions in English. And the study also utilizes the method of contrastive analysis to find out the equivalentents between the two languages concerning aspects of complex prepositions.

### 3.2. DATA COLLECTION

The data used in the study will be mainly collected from formal documents such as: agreements, treaties, contracts, degrees, ordinances, circulars or other related documents.

The data also come from 100 complex prepositions in formal written texts in English and the same number in Vietnamese.

### 3.3. DATA ANALYSIS

Firstly, general and specific semantic features of complex prepositions of English are presented in turn.

Secondly, complex prepositions of English and their following collocation are presented through clear and understandable examples.

After presenting the semantic features, collocations of English complex prepositions, the discussion of findings is carried out to find out similarities and differences of complex prepositions

in English and their Vietnamese equivalent in terms of semantic and collocation. Furthermore, the results serve as the foundation for discussing the ways the English and the equivalents in Vietnamese conceive of complex prepositions in general.

Suggesting some solutions for teaching, learning and translating complex prepositions of English.

### **3.4. PROCEDURES**

The steps involved in the study are as follows:

- Defining theoretical basis on which this research is done.
- Collecting the complex prepositions in English agreements, treaties, contracts, decrees, ordinances, circulars or other related documents and their equivalents in Vietnamese.
- Classifying the data into groups on the basis of the semantic features in each language.
- Analyzing the semantic features and collocations of complex prepositions in English and their equivalents in Vietnamese.
- Discovering linguistic performance of each way to express complex prepositions in English and their equivalents in Vietnamese.
- Suggesting some implications for teaching and learning languages as well as translation.

### **3.5. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY**

As regard to reliability, the data are collected from the real formal documents, such as agreements, treaties, contracts, decrees,

ordinances, circulars in both languages in paper as well as online. Furthermore, any quotation in this thesis is clearly shown with bibliography in which the authors, the publishers, the publication year are exactly quoted.

In conformity with validity, English complex prepositions to have been collected satisfy the demand of the set-up criteria. The samples, as mentioned-above, in both languages have been extracted from reliable sources of formal documents which are currently used in administration as well as on the internet. Particularly, the semantic classification of complex prepositions is based on the context in which they are employed. Then their equivalents in Vietnamese in terms of semantic features and collocation are taken into consideration. Last but not least, the collected data are analyzed in accordance with the theoretical background being designed in Chapter 2.



## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1. SEMANTIC FEATURES OF COMPLEX PREPOSITIONS IN ENGLISH

Semantically, Complex prepositions in English function diversifiedly, especially in formal documents. Their semantic nuances make such document more formal and communicative.

- 4.1.1 Complex Prepositions Denoting Purpose
- 4.1.2. Complex Prepositions Denoting Reference
- 4.1.3. Complex Prepositions Denoting Process
- 4.1.4. Complex Prepositions Denoting Quantity
- 4.1.5. Complex Prepositions Denoting Completion
- 4.1.6. Complex prepositions Denoting Means
- 4.1.7. Complex Prepositions Denoting Condition
- 4.1.8. Complex Prepositions Denoting Concession
- 4.1.9. Complex Prepositions Denoting Payment
- 4.1.10. Complex Prepositions Denoting Replacement
- 4.1.11. Complex Prepositions Denoting Exchange
- 4.1.12. Complex Prepositions Denoting Foundation
- 4.1.13. Complex Prepositions Denoting Representative
- 4.1.14. Complex Prepositions Denoting Addition
- 4.1.15. Complex Prepositions Denoting Reduction
- 4.1.16. Complex Prepositions Denoting Reason
- 4.1.17. Complex Prepositions Denoting Progress

#### 4.1.18. Complex Prepositions Denoting Absence

#### 4.1.19. Complex Prepositions Denoting heading

#### 4.2. SEMANTIC EQUIVALENTS OF ENGLISH COMPLEX PREPOSITIONS IN VIETNAMESE

##### 4.2.1. Semantic Equivalents of English Complex Prepositions Denoting Reference in Vietnamese

##### 4.2.2. Semantic Equivalents of English Complex Prepositions Denoting Foundation in Vietnamese

##### 4.2.3. Semantic Equivalents of English Complex Prepositions Denoting Replacement in Vietnamese

##### 4.2.4. Semantic Equivalents of English Complex Prepositions Denoting Reason in Vietnamese

##### 4.2.5. Semantic Equivalents of English Complex Prepositions Denoting Condition in Vietnamese

##### 4.2.6. Semantic Equivalents of English Complex Prepositions Denoting Process in Vietnamese

##### 4.2.7. Semantic Equivalents of English Complex Prepositions Denoting Purpose in Vietnamese

#### 4.3. ENGLISH COMPLEX PREPOSITIONS AND THEIR COLLOCATIONS

In regard to collocation, prepositions in English and Vietnamese in formal documents can be collated to the following nouns or noun phrases which they combined with. In reality, during the teaching and learning English, we can see that students have a lot of difficulties in using not only the English prepositions

and their Vietnamese equivalent correctly but also the collocation of prepositions in English and Vietnamese.

#### **4.3.1. English Complex Prepositions of Reference and Their Collocations**

#### **4.3.2. English Complex Prepositions of Purpose and Their Collocations**

#### **4.3.3. English Complex Prepositions of Process and Their Collocations**

#### **4.3.4. English Complex Prepositions of Condition and Their Collocations**

#### **4.3.5. English Complex Prepositions of Other Meanings and Their Collocations**

### **4.4. VIETNAMESE PREPOSITIONS AND THEIR COLLOCATION IN FORMAL DOCUMENTS**

Semantically, on the basis of the collected data, the semantic domains of complex prepositions used in English formal are diverse than those in Vietnamese ones. In accordance with our research, we find 19 nuances complex prepositions in English; otherwise, there are only in 7 equivalent nuances in Vietnamese prepositions. The equivalent meanings of English complex prepositions that cannot be found in Vietnamese prepositions are *quantity, completion, means, concession, payment, exchange, addition, reduction, progress, absence, and heading*.

With regard to collocation between English complex prepositions and the following units of language and their equivalents in Vietnamese, we can come to a conclusion that

English complex prepositions can be structured with nouns, noun equivalents, such as noun phrases, gerunds. By contrast, the Vietnamese prepositions used in formal can be constructed with not only nouns but also verbs. With reference to the semantic collocation, we have also introduced the English complex prepositions typically employed in the formal document together with their collocated elements in Table 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6. In addition, the Vietnamese equivalents of the English complex prepositions are also mentioned in these Tables so as to help learners implicate in translation.

**CHAPTER 5**  
**CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**  
**LIMITATIONS – RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the four previous chapter, we have answered the questions about semantic features and collocations of complex prepositions in English, and have mentioned semantic and collocation equivalents of English complex prepositions in Vietnamese. From the result of the investigation in this chapter we will emphasize the following points as the conclusions and the implications for language learning and teaching.

### 5.1 CONCLUSIONS

In compliance with semantic nuances of complex prepositions in English and their equivalents in Vietnamese, it can be stated that the central noun normally plays a more important role in identifying the meaning of complex prepositions in English formal documents than the preceding and following prepositions in these structure. However, in some cases, the meaning complex prepositions in English cannot be identified from the meaning of central nouns. From the result of the study in semantic areas, the meanings of English complex prepositions in formal document can be identified as follow. First of all, if the meanings of English complex prepositions can be looked up in the dictionary, we can refer the meaning of complex prepositions in the contextual situation to its most suitable meaning in the dictionary so as to choose the right definition for the language use in the document.

Secondly, in case that the meaning of complex prepositions cannot be listed in the dictionary, we have to identify the meaning of English complex prepositions on the semantic fields of the central nouns. This means that the nuances of complex prepositions depend upon the logical notion of the central nouns in the context in which complex prepositions are used. Thirdly, on condition that both the meanings of English complex prepositions cannot be referred to dictionaries and the meanings of central nouns in their structure do not bind those of the whole complex prepositions, the contextual circumstances will be the main factor to predict the sense of complex prepositions in formal documents. Particularly, in case that the meaning of complex prepositions can be found in dictionaries but the nuances of the central noun in complex prepositions cannot be identified then, only the context and the meaning of complex prepositions in the dictionary can help.

However, in any cases, the context; i.e. the situations in which English complex prepositions are employed must be considered as the most paramount factor so as to predict their meanings. Or in other words, in order to identify the meanings of English complex prepositions in formal documents, we not only pay attention to their meanings extracted from the dictionary but also examine them in the context and we have to combine all the factors to predict their meanings as adequately as possible.

With respect to English complex prepositions and their collocation in formal documents, it can be asserted that complex prepositions can be syntactically constructed with nouns or noun equivalents such as noun phrases, gerunds; otherwise, in

Vietnamese, such equivalents to English complex prepositions can be not only nouns but also other categories. Due to the complexity of syntactic categories in Vietnamese and the limitation of this thesis, syntactic categories of the equivalents to English complex prepositions in Vietnamese are not mentioned in our research. Semantically, certain English complex prepositions must collate with certain following nominal elements. For example, the English complex preposition *in accordance with* or *in conformity with* can collate with the noun *provision* but the English complex preposition *under the terms of* may not, according to our collected data, although all of them are complex prepositions that are used to denote *reference*. Please refer to Table 4.2 p.50.

In line with those who come from English speaking countries or can speak English as a second language in the era of globalization and intergration refer to study Vietnamese could have the same difficulties as the Vietnamese people learning English in especially using collocation. As a result, the introduction of the collocation equivalents of English complex prepositions in Vietnamese must be practical solutions. The outcome from our research can be beneficial not only for Vietnamese students who study English but also for foreigners from English speaking countries who learn Vietnamese.

## 5.2 IMPLICATIONS

In terms of teaching English language as a second language, the result of our study can, to some extent, help students of English understand the semantic features of complex prepositions

not only in formal documents but also in the text books, or any other materials in which complex prepositions are used. More importantly, the study on the collocation between complex prepositions assist learners of English to use language skills, particularly writing, speaking better and better.

As regard to translation, the result of the study also play an important role in improving and fostering skills of translation, in particular the translation of concerned complex prepositions and their collocation in formal documents. It should be emphasized here that the research provides learners of English not only capacity of the English – Vietnamese translation of complex prepositions but also their Vietnamese-English translation as well.

## 5.3 LIMITATIONS

Owing to the restriction of time and the shortage of reference materials related to the field under investigation as well as the constraints faced by the researcher, it goes without saying that there must exist mistakes in this thesis and it has not reached a satisfactory depth as it should. Due to the limited knowledge of the researcher in Vietnamese linguistics in addition to the complicated classification of prepositions in particular and other syntactic categories in general in Vietnamese; therefore, we encounter some problems in the study.

## 5.4. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

In order to continue our study of complex prepositions in English, we will investigate cohesive features of complex

prepositions in formal documents. We will also invest time dealing with another type of complex prepositions such as *according to*, *owing to*, *due to* and so forth, also in terms of also semantic and collocation so as to apply in our teaching as well as translation.