

**If you're about distributional semantics, you'll be into this talk:
semantic change in the recent history of *into* and *about***

Much like the majority of other English prepositions, *into* and *about* can express a wide array of meanings, including spatial (1), temporal (2), and more abstract senses (3)-(4):

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| (1) Where's all the visitors gone? - Oh, they are about the house somewhere (1885, COHA) | He was into her bed in a flash, stocking and all. (1940, COHA) |
| (2) The moon will be up about midnight (1911, COHA) | By the time they are into their forties they have enough seniority to chair important committees. (1963, COHA) |
| (3) Most of the book is about her father (1955, COHA) | She's into erotic movies for the money. What she really is is a musician. (1980, COHA) |
| (4) I got between her and Dad and demanded a hug. Yes, I was all about the hugs. (2008, COHA) | She'd be up for it. She's into good-looking men. (1995, COHA) |

In Cognitive Semantics, prepositions have become somewhat notorious for being “multiply polysemous” (Cuyckens & Radden 2002: xiii). As such, the meanings prepositions can express are typically represented as networks of conceptually (i.e. metaphorically, metonymically) linked senses (Cuyckens 1999: 15). However, it is very difficult to reach a consensus on the most plausible shape of these representations: the proposed senses in the networks and the distances/connections between them are often derived from subjective intuitions, which are ultimately not falsifiable (Glynn 2014: 17). To attain more credible approximations of such (prepositional) polysemy networks, then, it is key to investigate whether relations between senses are justifiable on *historical* grounds (Rice 1996: 143; Cuyckens 1999: 16), as well as to approach the concept of semantic relatedness in a more objective, data-driven or even usage-based way (e.g. Gries & Divjak 2005; Sagi et al. 2011; Glynn 2014).

The present study offers such a data-driven, diachronic approach to prepositional networks. While even the earliest attestations of prepositions often already exhibit a wide range of senses (making it difficult to investigate how new senses emerge), the emergence of cases where *into* or *about* mark a trajector's interest/fondness regarding a landmark (4) can be traced back to the second half of the 20th century. Supported by the sizable Corpus of Historical American English (COHA, 400M words), this study sets out to capture the most plausible origin and diachronic trajectory of the ‘fondness’ sense attested with *about* and *into* (*space* > *temporary involvement* > (*habitual involvement* > *fondness*). At the same time, it will also map out the diachronic development of the more general prepositional networks of *into* and *about* by means of a state-of-the-art, token-based distributional semantic model called BERT (Devlin et al. 2018). This model creates compressed usage representations of individual contextualized tokens of *into* and *about* (ca. 55,000 tokens) in the form of vectors. By means of these token vectors, we can induce a large-scale and data-driven estimation of the distances or ‘semantic relatedness’ (cf. Rice 1996) between all senses of *into* and *about* in various time stages. This, in turn, allows us to quantitatively investigate whether (distributional) semantic closeness indeed corresponds with the order of diachronic emergence of a polysemous construction's (sub)senses.

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