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tion) or should the starting point be the preposition itself (viz. L. A. Hill, 1960)? Until recently these problems were exacerbated by a shortage of data. However, practical it may seem, given that prepositions are one of the most frequent classes of words in language, before the arrival of electronic databases the very fact of high incidence of most prepositions made it difficult to delineate the range of uses of a particular preposition or to make an extensive survey of prepositions collocating with a particular lexical item. The complexity of prepositions and their description is just as daunting from a contrastive point of view. Everyday experience shows that even for the most advanced non-native speakers of English they prove to be a rather stumbling block. There are apparently two reasons for this: interference with the system of prepositions in the non-native speaker's mother tongue and the absence of clearly stated conditions and rules for the use of prepositions.

The present study is intended as a contribution to the study of the less explored type of prepositions, complex prepositions consisting of three words. It was started by suggesting a closely related theme for a student's MA thesis, took shape during the supervision, was developed in a paper published in a journal and finally expanded to a book. The idea of combining a theoretical study with a dictionary was gradually crystallizing in proportion to the accumulation of the material. The advantage of such a structure is that it allows the author to include all instances of three-word sequences he has gathered which would otherwise shrink into a handful of examples in the text or turn into mere figures. It seemed a pity to waste the opportunity to bring these sequences — some of them scattered throughout dictionaries and grammar books, others never recorded as such before — together in one volume. Even more so when, in the author's translating experience, they are an extremely de-fus and versatile tool. The suspicion that there are more such units in English than one finds in the lexicon has been more than amply confirmed. The