

The Prepositional Alienation — English "For" and the Impossibility of Anchoring Function Without Intent

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Abstract

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Author: Johannes Sigil **ORCID:** 0009-0000-1599-0703 **Date:** 2026-02-11 **Family:** GOVERNANCE
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Body

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Cross-linguistic evidence (Ancient Greek, Latin, German) confirms that the distinction is grammaticalized in other languages, demonstrating that the English incapacity is contingent, not necessary. Under platform capitalism, the prepositional alienation is indexed, amplified, and commodified through character limits, algorithmic ranking, content moderation rubrics, and AI summarization — transforming a grammatical default into commercial infrastructure. This is the founding document of liberation philology. The Core Finding. English “for” can contain the functional-teleological reading — the reading in which “for” indicates what something structurally serves or accomplishes, independent of anyone’s intention — but it cannot anchor to that reading. The intent/purpose reading is always available, always default, always dominant. There is no dedicated English preposition that means “this is what it was functionally for, regardless of what anyone meant.” The structural parallel to the Phase X finding on the aorist aspect is exact: just as the simple past can contain the aorist but cannot anchor to it (no dedicated perfective morphology), “for” can contain function but cannot anchor to it (no dedicated non-intent-indexed preposition). Both gaps force structural claims to operate as guests in the house of psychological attribution. The Genealogy — Four Phases of Collapse. Old English *for* (pre-1066): Primarily causal (*for þæm* — “for that reason”) and substitutive (“He *for* Gode spræc” — “He spoke for God,” i.e., in God’s stead). Purpose was expressed by *tō* + inflected infinitive, not by *for*. The instrumental case and *mid* carried instrumental function without purposive implication. The system was distributed: purpose, cause, function, and instrument occupied distinct grammatical territories. Norman French contamination (1066–1400): Anglo-Norman *pur* carried a fused semantic range — purposive, benefactive, exchange, causal, and functional/role (“*Tenir pur fief*” — “to hold as a fief”). Bilingual scribes, translating administrative documents under time pressure, extended English *for* to cover the full territory of *pur*. This is translation-induced structural borrowing: the inflation of a native preposition under contact pressure. The “for to” + infinitive construction (calqued from French *pour* + infinitive) explicitly grammaticalized intent into the preposition. Middle English estate records show the calque in action: “To holden for fee and for servise” renders AN “*Tenir pur fief et pur service*” — a functional-role sense that Old English *for* did not carry. Latin substrate (continuous): Latin distinguished *ad* (purpose — directed toward an intended end) from *pro* (function — in the structural role of). Two prepositions, two cases, two semantic fields. English “for” was pressed to translate both, compressing function and purpose into a single lexical item. The legal phrase “for all intents and purposes” (attested 1540s, Statute of Proclamations) crystallizes the fusion at the institutional level: English law declared intent and purpose equivalent. Enlightenment hardening (17th–18th c.): The mechanistic rejection of Aristotelian final causation (Bacon, Descartes) eliminated the philosophical basis for non-intentional teleology. If final causes are illegitimate, the only “for” is the “for” of human purpose. This is metapragmatic regimentation (Silverstein 1979): philosophical elites reshape the ideology of the grammar, stigmatizing the functional-teleological reading as unscientific. The grammarians’ project naturalized the fusion as polysemy. Charles Taylor’s “punctual self” (1989) found reinforcement in a prepositional system that defaults to intent. Disciplinary Situating — Six Traditions Synthesized. The essay positions liberation philology as the synthesis of traditions that independently developed the resources but never combined them: Historical linguistics / Grammaticalization theory (Traugott, Hopper): Shows how semantic change occurs — does not ask *cui bono*. Political economy of language (Voloshinov, Gramsci, Bourdieu): Shows language is shaped by power — does not descend into the morphosyntactic inventory. Sapir-Whorf / Thinking for Speaking (Slobin, Lucy): Shows grammar shapes habitual thought — does not ask why this distinction was lost through these events. Deconstruction (Derrida): Operates at the right depth (structural occlusion) — targets metaphysical categories, not prepositions. Decolonial linguistics (Mignolo, Phillipson, Pennycook, Canagarajah): Analyzes the imposition of one grammatical system on another — does not examine the internal deficiencies of the imperial grammar. Semantic Economy (Sharks 2025–2026): Grammar as means of semantic production — the circumlocution tax is semantic rent extracted under platform capitalism. Liberation philology adds: historical-linguistic genealogy in the service of structural diagnosis, applied to the morphosyntactic infrastructure through which ideological claims must pass,

analyzed for consequences in the political economy of meaning. Cross-Linguistic Evidence. The distinction between function and intent is grammaticalized in multiple languages, confirming that the English incapacity is contingent: Ancient Greek: + subjunctive (purpose: someone intended this) vs. + indicative (result: this is what actually happened). Thucydides 1.23.6 demonstrates the diagnostic capacity: the truest cause (prophasis) vs. the stated grievances (aitiai) — structural function distinguished from declared intent. Latin: ad + gerundive (purpose) vs. pro + ablative (function/role). Cicero De Officiis 3.6: pro iure civili habetur — “held in the functional capacity of civil law.” German: als (function/role, explicitly non-intentional) vs. um...zu (purpose, explicitly intent-indexed). Consequences for Structural Analysis. Prosecutorial capture: Every functional diagnosis made with “for” can be heard as an intent claim. “That wasn’t our intention” is always grammatically available as a defense, always beside the point. Circumlocution tax: “She did it for power” (4 words, intent claim) vs. “The structural function of the process, independent of anyone’s conscious intention, was the reproduction of power” (19 words, functional claim). The grammar rewards intent claims with elegance and punishes functional claims with bureaucratic paraphrase. Alienation (selective Marxian analogy): The speaker produces a functional claim; the grammar converts it into an intent-attribution that is not the speaker’s meaning. The means of semantic production operates as an alien force. Class dimension: The loss is most complete in administrative registers — the registers through which Norman French and Latin exerted influence, the registers the professional-managerial class is trained to produce and reproduce. Platform Capitalism — Indexing and Commodification. The essay demonstrates that platform capitalism does not merely inherit the prepositional alienation but indexes, amplifies, and commodifies it: Character limits make the circumlocution tax unpayable — the functional claim cannot fit within 280 characters. Algorithmic ranking favors intent-indexed claims (emotionally activating) over functional analysis (emotionally inert), turning the grammatical default into a visibility regime. Content moderation operates as intent jurisprudence — “did the user intend harm?” rather than “does this content functionally serve harm?” AI summarization inherits and reproduces the default autoregressively — millions of intent-indexed summaries become training data for the next generation of models. SEO and brand narrative commodify the gap: businesses pay to control which “for” reading attaches to them. Autonomous Semantic Warfare names this explicitly. The platform as Norman scribe: Both compress function into intent under institutional pressure; both deposit in

Provenance

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