

With a Revolver in the Library

by Dr Julia Miller

Scene 1. Ms Parrot's study

Ms Parrot: One of my most embarrassing cases occurred in a country house where I was a guest, along with singers Bobby Dylan and Kareena Kapadia, my friend Professor Grahamarian, the secret agent Prince Wolfgang and the food critic Gordon Chan. Harumi Kaga was the chef.

Scene 2. The country house

Ms Parrot, Professor Grahamarian, Prince Wolfgang and Kareena are playing Cluedo and Prince Wolfgang is showing Kareena a revolver. Bobby Dylan is singing the prepositions song.

Bobby Dylan: An essay on statistics
Involved in linguistics -
How do prepositions work and how can we be sure of them?
I've heard on good authority
In English the majority
Of people think that prepositions are too hard to learn.

Research in
Language that's
Relevant for paragraphs.
Theories about
Strategies for
Linking nouns and verbs.
If you're writing up a
Sentence about
Photographs and monographs,
Then don't forget the
Meaning of
These tiny little words.

Under, on or over
In or out or under,
Many prepositions are not easy to discern.
Instructing us in writing,
Isn't it exciting?
These words add all the richness to the languages we learn.

(A bell rings.)

Ms Parrot: That's the bell for dinner!

(They all get up and leave the room. Time passes.)

Scene 3. After dinner. Professor Grahamarian, Kareena, Ms Parrot and Prince Wolfgang are back in the drawing room.

Professor Grahamarian: I really enjoyed that. Chocolate pudding – a really healthy dessert!
(To Kareena) What a pity you're on a diet! Bobby's vegetarian version looked good!

Ms Parrot: And she made me a dairy free option too. So kind!

Prince Wolfgang: What excellent soup!

Scene 4. The country house library. Harumi Kaga is getting a book from the shelf.

Harumi Kaga: Vegetarians. Herbivores.

Ms Parrot: Harumi was looking for a book on Australian cooking. A book of Australian recipes, in fact. She had been to a lecture on local cuisine and she was involved in an experimental cooking group.

Harumi Kaga: Soshokei danshi.

Ms Parrot: The criteria for membership were that you had to enjoy cooking and you had to be a professional chef.

Harumi Kaga: Diets . . .

Ms Parrot: She felt very positive about this and had consulted her employer about trying some new recipes.

Scene 5. The drawing room.

Professor Grahamarian, Kareena, Ms Parrot and Prince Wolfgang are still in the drawing room. They hear a noise like a gun.

Kareena: What's that?

Prince Wolfgang: I say!

(Gordon Chan enters the drawing room and joins them.)

Gordon Chan: What a terrible meal!

Professor Grahamarian: I thought it was excellent. Harumi is a wonderful chef.

(Bobby Dylan rushes in.)

Bobby Dylan: Harumi's been shot – with a revolver – in the library. She's dead!

(They all look at the Cluedo game board, which does indeed have a revolver in the library.)

Professor Grahamarian: Are you sure?

Bobby Dylan: I saw her go into the library. Then I heard a bang.

Kareena Kapadia: So did I!

Professor Grahamarian: And I!

Bobby Dylan: There's no one but us in the house. The murderer must be someone in this room!

Prince Wolfgang: Let me see what's happened.

(Prince Wolfgang goes out with Bobby Dylan and Kareena Kapadia.)

Professor Grahamarian: None of us had a gun.

Ms Parrot: Oh yes we did. There was one here, in this very room. We all had access to it.

Gordon Chan: Yes, I remember. It belongs to Prince Wolfgang, and Kareena was looking at it ... and Prince Wolfgang has a certificate in shooting.

Professor Grahamarian: But what was the motive? I can't think of any motive for killing her. Harumi was an expert in the kitchen. Quite a contrast to the chef they had last year. I mean, Harumi never imposed her ideas on us, and she nearly converted me to Japanese cooking! But she never lectured me about it.

Gordon Chan: I suppose she had the odd publication on cooking.

Ms Parrot: She was the author of many books about cooking! She must have had an enormous impact on Japanese cooking in Australia.

Gordon Chan: Well, let's not rely on rumours. The bulk of her work was not that good.

Professor Grahamarian: She had a wonderful attitude to cooking. That meal was terrific. As I said, I can't think of any motive for killing her.

Ms Parrot: Let's think back to the meal. Kareena didn't eat anything. You (to Professor Grahamarian) ate everything. Prince Wolfgang confined himself to soup. Bobby's vegetarian meal was more than adequate.

Gordon Chan: What about you, Ms Parrot?

Ms Parrot: I can't eat milk products, so Harumi had to substitute sorbet for ice cream for my dessert. She was very understanding about it, though.

Professor Grahamarian: So who had a motive?

Ms Parrot: Two people hardly ate anything. Two of us had meals that were adapted to our dietary needs. But I'm only aware of one person who didn't enjoy their meal. (She looks at Gordon.)

Gordon Chan: I was with you after dinner, Ms Parrot.

Ms Parrot: Not immediately. Kareena was with Prince Wolfgang. I was playing a board game with Professor Grahamarian, and you joined us a little later. There was an interval of about ten minutes between the time we finished dinner and the time you joined us.

Gordon Chan: Not enjoying a meal is not a motive to kill someone. And Bobby came in late too.

Ms Parrot: That's true. However, there was also your professional jealousy as a chef. You and Harumi both published widely in the area of cooking. You both did research on Asian cooking in Australia. Last year you both contributed to a new cookery book, but she wrote five chapters on Japanese cuisine, and you only wrote a paragraph on the art of cutting vegetables. She had recently replaced you as President of the Academy of Celebrity Chefs. And you lost the Essay Chef cooking competition when she was the judge. In short, she was a great challenge to your career. You never really recovered from the shock of her success.

Professor Grahamarian: And there's one more thing. You have blood on your tie!

Gordon Chan: It's tomato sauce!

Professor Grahamarian: And you've got a revolver!

Gordon Chan: Don't shoot! It's not mine! I didn't kill Harumi!

Harumi enters the lounge with Prince Wolfgang, Kareena Kapadia and Bobby Dylan. Harumi has a cut on her face.

Ms Parrot: You're alive!

Harumi Kaga (surprised): Yes.

Professor Grahamarian: We heard a sound like a gun!

Harumi Kaga: The cat surprised me in the library and I dropped a book. Then I fell over and hit my head.

Prince Wolfgang: I say. That's my revolver. But it's not a real one.

(He demonstrates the joke gun.)

Ms Parrot: I'd like to apologise on behalf of everyone here, Gordon.

(Gordon leaves angrily.)

Ms Parrot: Poor Gordon. What a terrible mistake!

Scene 6. Ms Parrot's study

Ms Parrot: Of course, I'm not biased towards anyone, but you must admit that someone who doesn't enjoy learning about grammar is a bit suspicious!

Let's look at some of the smaller words in that story. I'd like you to consider the prepositions. Prepositions are small words that show a relationship between one word and another word in English. Here are some examples. *About, at, between, for, from, in, on, to, towards* and *with* are all prepositions. These are some of the hardest words for learners of English to use correctly.

In our story, there were a lot of verbs and prepositions from the Academic Word List (<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist>). These are the words most frequently used in English academic writing.

The problem with prepositions is that they may not exist in your first language, or they may be used differently. For example, would you say the banana in the picture is in the bowl? It is in English, even though it's sitting outside the bowl on top of the other fruit.

And what about prepositions in academic writing. How do you know if you should talk about an essay *on* something or *for* something?

One way to think about prepositions is to imagine a picture. For example, you can imagine an essay sitting *on* a topic. Or you can put an emphasis *on* something.

Another way to check which preposition you need is to look in a good learner's dictionary. There are many learner's dictionaries online, and I have links on the English for Uni website (www.adelaide.edu.au/english-for-uni).

I hope you've enjoyed learning about prepositions. Now I'm going to take Gordon to a wonderful restaurant to compensate for our terrible mistake.