DIRECTION AND PROXIMITY IN THE ROMANIAN PREPOSITIONS SPRE, CĂTRE, ÎNSPRE. A COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS APPROACH

Adina Oana Nicolae
Assoc. Prof., PhD, Petroleum-Gas University of Ploieşti

Abstract:Drawing on the claims put forth by cognitive semantics and cognitive grammar, this paper provides an analysis of three Romanian prepositions (spre, către, înspre) which share the central semantic features of direction and proximity. Although all these prepositions code basic spatial relations between two physical entities, they have developed further non-spatial meanings pertaining to temporal, teleological and stance scenarios. While suggesting diagrammatic representations for the image schemas underlying diverse prepositional meanings in conventional language contexts, it is argued that the spatial scene, due to its physical experiential grounding, serves as the foundation for the concrete to abstract semantic extension.

Keywords: cognitive linguistics, prepositions, direction, proximity, polysemy

Rooted in the scholarsř efforts to establish modern cognitive science in the 1960s and 1970s, cognitive linguistics has been, ever since, a fervently developing array of language studies, an řenterpriseř (Evans and Green 2006:3) which has gone řwhere no man has gone beforeř. It has never stopped being a generous field, home to diverse and sometimes diverging theories and explanations, yet it has remained true to a number of commitments that comply with the belief that language and languages provide evidence for the way in which human beings form mental representations of reality. As such, it has brought together cognitive semantics and cognitive grammar into a coherent approach that is capable, though not always smoothly and thoroughly, of providing a unitary perspective on language phenomena that have been so far kept apart. One such topic is that of prepositions, a category traditionally assigned to morphology and considered a rather peripheral closed-class system.

Since cognitive linguistics affords a new perspective on space and the metaphorical amplification of spatial relations, prepositions have been reconsidered in a cognitive semantics light in a series of studies concerning the conceptual projections of prepositions in various languages (e.g. Cienki 1989 , Tyler and Evans 2007, Imre 2009, 2012, Saric 2014). According to cognitive linguistics literature, the constructions that prepositions enter rely on conceptualisations that originate in spatial scenes and may be metaphorically extended into abstract projections. The implications that have been highlighted are connected not only to the exploration of polysemy, but also to the overlap of semantic content in prepositions within a language and across languages, which, in turn, has consequences for applied linguistics domains such as translation and foreign language teaching.

A semantic model of prepositions is the brainchild of Brugman and Lakoff (1988), who posited and analysed the hypothesis of a prototypical spatial meaning that yields further radiating meanings, displayed in a network configuration. The hypothesis is grounded in the prototype theory of meaning (Rosch 1973, Lakoff 1987), which postulates the existence of graded categorization, i.e. the functioning of categories where members are more or less prototypical or central. In discussing the semantics of the preposition *over*, Lakoffřs account (1987) demonstrates that the word senses exhibit typicality effects visible in the expansion of a central spatial meaning into more peripheral, metaphorically derived meanings of the term. Less prototypical members of the category, in the cognitive linguistics framework, arise from

more prototypical exemplars by meaning extension, including metaphorization and image schema transformations. The result is a network of senses that maps multiple related meanings of the same term, traditionally identified as polysemy.

Apart from the notions of conceptual metaphors (correspondences in thought and language between two experiential domains) and image schemas (preconceptual, generic conceptual structures derived from embodied experience), a reconsideration of prepositions within the territory of cognitive linguistics draws on Langackerřs theory of Cognitive Grammar (1987) and its postulation of the way figure and ground interface as trajector (TR) and landmark (LM).

The Romanian prepositions to be addressed herein are *spre, către, înspre*(typically translatable as *towards* or *to*). *Spre* is etymologically related to the Latin *super*, while *înspre* is a compound preposition resulting from *în* (in) and *spre* (towards). *Către* (with the archaic or regional variants *către, către*) is equally inherited from the Latin word *contra*. What these three prepositions have in common is, according to *Gramatica limbii române* (1966), a traditional reference grammar of Romanian, the basic meaning of direction and proximity, whereas the customary syntactic function of the prepositional phrases they belong to is that of Adverbial of Place. This is *avant la lettre* recognition of the fact that the use of these three prepositions is licensed by the Source-Path-Goal schema, a fundamental cognitive pattern literally structuring the concept of Journey. Involving physical or metaphorical movement, the components of this schema are a starting point, a goal, a series of intermediate points that constitute a path followed according to a certain orientation (direction).Among the basic logic assumptions one can mention the fact that the more intermediate points have been covered by a vehicle on its path towards the goal, the closer it gets to the goal and the farther it is from the source. As such, the Source-Path-Goal schema contains both direction and proximity, incumbent in the Romanian prepositions *spre, către, înspre*. The way these prepositions are cognitive constructs governed by the Source-Path-Goal schema is to be determined analytically based on their functions, as listed in *Gramatica limbii române.* They range from place, time, purpose, to attitude and direct address.

1. Spatial scenarios

Human conceptualisation of space manifests itself in different patterns whose aspects are individualised in a language, thereby achieving specific representations. These representations, known as spatial scenes (Talmy 2000), are shaped by factors such as figure-ground segregation, the relative proximity between figure and ground and the figure-ground positioning (Evans and Green 2006: 69). A series of features distinguishes the figure, or trajector (TR), from the reference object, also called ground or landmark (LM): the former is typically smaller, more mobile, of greater concern, more dependent and therefore perceptually more salient. In the case of the target prepositions, *spre, către, înspre,* the landmark is always specified, while the trajector is either explicit (in (1), it is the gaze) or left implicit (for example, in (2)):

(1) *îşi întoarse privirea spre/către/înspre lac (he averted his gaze to the lake)*

(2) *privi spre/către/înspre lac (he looked at the lake)*

One can notice the constraint operating with respect to the schematic spatial scene that encodes the distance between the figure and the ground. *Spre, către* and *înspre* allset the proximity parameter to either adjacency or contact. The trajector is adjacent to the landmark in (3), (4), (5), and in contact with the reference object (*school*, *home*, *forest*, respectively) in (6), (7), (8):

(3) *îşi înălţă privirea spre cer (he raised his eyes to the sky)*

(4) *îşi ridică mîinile către cer (he raised his hands to the sky)*

(5) *mergi înspre est (go east)*

(6) *drumul spre şcoală (the road to school)*
(7) *drumul către casă (the road home)*
(8) *porni înspre pădure (he set out for the forest)*

However, adjacency and contact are made possible by two different reference frames. On the one hand, contact involves only one reference object within its ground-based reference frame. On the other hand, adjacency is assessed within a field-based reference frame, where east and sky are interpretable due to a secondary reference object, the Earth.

The oscillation between one or two reference objects, on the one hand, and adjacency and contact between figure and primary reference object, on the other hand, does not allow a basic schema to operate for all the cases of spatial positioning between TR and LM with respect to the prepositions under discussion. A blueprint of the Source-Path-Goal figure-ground segregation, proximity and positioning is given in Figure 1 below.

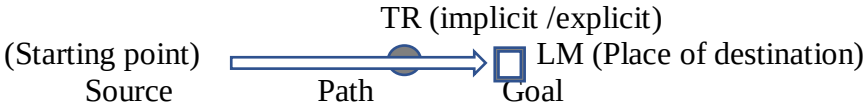

Figure 1. The basic schema for *spre, către, înspre*

The construal of the spatial scene which conveys the central spatial meaning of *spre, către, înspre* allows the speaker tohighlight the Path element and conceal the trajector in (9) and (10):

(9) *cărarea spre izvor (the road to the spring)*
(10) *drumul către biserică (the road to the church)*

The starting point of the implicit motion along the specified Path, typically kept out of sight as in (9) and (10) above, can become salient by means of adding a prepositional phrase governed by the preposition *dinspre*, formally and historically related to *spre* and *înspre*.

(12) *cărarea dinspre pădure spre izvor (the road from the forest to the spring)*
(13) *drumul dinspre sat către biserică (the road from the village to the church)*

The nature of trajector, whether implicit or explicit, is that of any moving entity; in the examples below, it is [-animate] in (14), [+animate], [-human] in (15) and [+human] in (16) and [+abstract] in (17).

(14) *teii se scutură înspre apa-ntunecată (the linden trees are shedding towards the dark water)*
(15) *pasărea zbura către cuib (the bird was flying to its nest)*
(16) *copilul alerga spre Dunăre (the child was running towards the Danube)*
(17) *sănătatea mergea înspre bine (his/her condition took a turn for the better)*

Although direction is connected to motion on a certain path, there are examples where direction and adjacency are presupposed in the absence of motion. The English translation provides evidence that this configuration accommodates both planar (e.g. (18)) and three-dimensional (e.g. (19)) landmarks, and there is a constraint on the aperture of the TR, which should be oriented towards the LM. The characteristic static schemas for examples such as (18) and (19) are represented in Figure 2 and Figure 3, respectively.

(18) *fereastră spre/către mare (window onto the sea)*

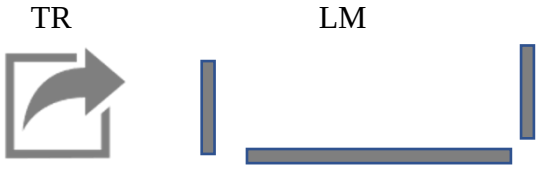

Figure 2. Static spatial schema for *spre, către*

(19) *a da spre curtea vecină (to look out into the neighbouring yard)*

Figure 3. Static spatial schema for *spre*

2. Temporal Scenarios

Unlike space, time does not lend itself to physical sensory perception. Both philosophers and linguists have been concerned with the subjective nature of the awareness of time and its Řpassingř. It has been already suggested that one of the metaphors that operates in English and Romanian is TIME IS A MOVING OBJECT, a mapping that explains the way space and time are closely linked in the construal of scenes. In a survey of the lexical concepts of time, Evans (2004) distinguishes between primary lexical concepts, which relate to common aspects related to the experience of time, and secondary lexical concepts, which are cultural constructs. Among the former, there are duration, moment, event and instance. Awareness of duration is relevant for the encoding of time spans such as night, dawn, evening, which, as seen below in (20), (21), (22), have been noticed to function as landmarks in the temporal scenarios instantiated below. The scenario is configured by taking into account the constraint that operates on these occurrences of *spre, către* and *înspre* in point of proximity, i.e. the path is bound to protrude into the landmark:

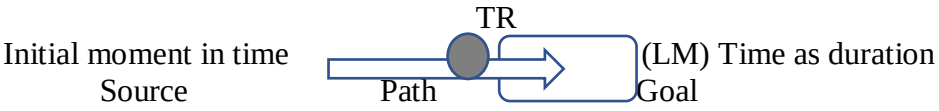

Figure 4. Temporal schema for *spre, către, înspre*

(20) *în noaptea spre 15 august (on the night of 14 to 15 August)*
(21) *spre zori (toward(s) the dawn)*
(22) *către seară (toward(s) evening)*

Intensification occurs in both the spatial and the temporal scenarios by means of the adverb *mai* (more), whose task is to push the trajector closer to the destination point, either in space or in time. Examples (23) and (24) are represented in Figure 5 below.

(23) *mai înspre seară (late in the afternoon, towards evening)*
(24) *mai către mijlocul grădinei (closer to the middle of the garden)*

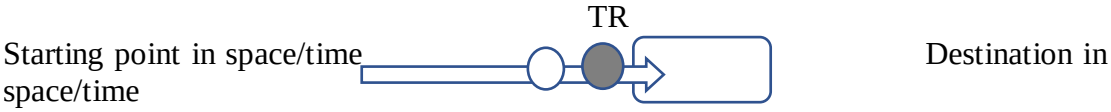

Figure 5. Temporal schema for intensified *spre, către, înspre*

3. Teleological scenarios

Example (17) above has anticipated the metaphorical extension of the spatial scenario to abstract movement. The Source-Path-Goal image schema transformation translates physical movement into an abstract environment, which is rendered by abstract concepts such as nouns (e.g. advantage (25), example (26)) or verbal infinitive forms (e.g. (27), (28)). Adjacency to the abstract destination is judged relative to an implicit abstract middle of the path between the Source and the Goal, conveying the fact that the trajector is past this abstract centre on its way to the Goal. The role of the abstract destination is enhanced and it is consistently mapped onto an Adverbial of Purpose.

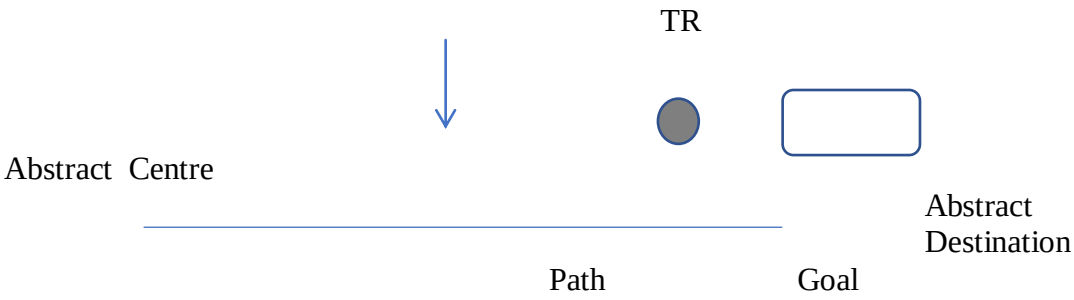

Figure 6. Abstract movement scenario for *spre, către*, *înspre*

(25) *uneltele sunt spre folos (the tools are to advantage)*
(26) *spre pildă/ spre exemplu (for example)*
(27) *uneltele sunt spre păstrare (the tools are to be kept)*
(28) *merge acolo spre a cerceta locul (he is going there in order to search the place)*

Occasionally, purpose and consequence are overridden by a nuance of manner, so that the resulting prepositional phrase is equated with an Adverbial of Manner (e.g. *spre marea lui bucurie* in (29)):

(29) *I-a dăruit o carte spre marea lui bucurie. (she gave him a book, to his delight)*

Within the same abstract configuration scenario one can include the use of *spre* in word formation. It is the case of compound cardinal numerals from 11 to 19. In Romanian, there is a unitary rule that appends, with occasional spelling changes, each cardinal numeral in the range of 1 to 9 to the preposition *spre* and the cardinal numeral *zece* (ten). *Spre*, therefore, still denotes adjacency and direction towards an abstract entity (see Figure 7 below), but on a vertical axis, so that addition over the base ten is synchronized with the MORE IS UP metaphorical mapping.

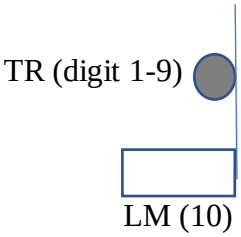

Figure 7. Addition scenario for *spre* in compound numerals

(30) *unsprezece, doisprezece, ..., nouăsprezece (eleven, twelve, ..., nineteen)*

4. Stance scenarios

Last but not least, direction and proximity are stepping stones to a construal of a stance scenario involving a human percipient in the role of landmark, while the trajector is non-human (e.g. (31)), customarily a situation which represents a stimulus that generates a psychological or emotional reaction in the experiencer (e.g. (30)). This stance or attitudinal scenario is, however, exclusively generated by *spre* prepositional phrases.

(31) *pasărea către ei se arată (the bird shows its face to them)*
(32) *spre marele regret (much to her regret)*

A further specification of the trajector, identified as human, accounts for interaction scenarios (e.g. (33)), for example communication (e.g. (34)), between TR and LM.

(33) *el era generos către vrăjmaşi (he was generous towards his enemies)*
(34) *Grăim, doamnă, către tine (We are turning to you, madam)*

LM TR

Figure 8. Stance scenario for *spre*

TR LM

Figure 9. Double stance scenario for *către*

By virtue of their proximity values, in the spatial, temporal and abstract scenarios, *spre/către/înspre* are means of denoting approximation in Romanian:

(35) *spre/către/înspre munţi (towards the mountains)*
(36) *spre/către/?înspre amiază (by midday)*
(37) *verde spre albastru (greenish blue)*

Conclusions

Senses of concepts in the spatio-physical world are, it has been demonstrated, extended to senses that are derived from, yet connected to spatial scenarios. Metaphorisation, harmonization of metaphorical cultural models and image schemas transformations contribute to the proliferation of senses and their integration into a coherent semantic network. A survey of prepositions such as *spre, către, înspre* mayprovide a clear illustration of the embodied cognition claim, which represents one of the premises of cognitive linguistics.

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