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METAPHOR IN PREPOSITION USAGE – ON THE TRANSLATION OF ENGLISH PREPOSITIONS

Ono što će se u ovom radu na kraju tvrditi jeste da je metafora ono na čemu su bazirani prijedlozi. Analizirat ćemo metaforičnu upotrebu engleskih prijedloga kroz kognitivnu lingvistiku. Pokazat ćemo na koji način je metafora zaslužna za česte greške pri prijevodu engleskih prijedloga u bosanski jezik. Kako bismo to dokazali koristit ćemo dvije bazne postavke kognitivne lingvistike – predodžbene sheme i utjelovljeno iskustvo.

Ključne riječi: *metafora, kognitivna lingvistika*

Introduction

The paper will operate within the enterprise of cognitive linguistics. Why cognitive linguistics? Cognitive linguistics places “central importance on the role of meaning, conceptual processes and embodied experience in the study of language and the mind and the way in which they intersect” (Evans, 22:2007). What stems from this is a view different from the traditional one. Our physical body is in a three-dimensional space which is a fact we cannot avoid. This, cognitive linguists would say, has to have an impact on the language we use. The spatio-temporal nature of our physical being influences the use of prepositions. English prepositions are discrepant with prepositions in the Bosnian language at a very high frequency. Each English preposition has its counterpart in Bosnian but only in the basic meaning e.g. the English preposition *in* is regarded synonym for the Bosnian preposition *u*, but only in the basic meaning where the two prepositions have spatial connotations. Prepositions, contrastively regarded, cannot be translated *ad hoc*, without being aware of the different meanings of one preposition in the other language. Why is this so? The reason is that prepositions abound in metaphorical language.

The cognitive approach to language

One of the two pillars of cognitive linguistics, the *Cognitive Commitment*, represents the view that principles of linguistic structure should reflect what is known about human cognition from other disciplines, particularly other cognitive sciences (philosophy, psychology, artificial intelligence and neuroscience) (Evans and Green; 2006: 40-41). The central idea in cognitive linguistics is embodied experience i.e. embodiment affects the nature of our experience. Evans and Green (2006) contrast the human visual system to the one of some species of animals, stating that humans have three kinds of photo-receptors whereas, e.g., pigeons have four, which eventually affects the way we, the humans, see colors.

“CL approaches language as an integrated part of human cognition which operates in interaction with and on the basis of the same principles as other cognitive faculties. CL is therefore defined as a linguistic theory which analyzes language in its relation to other cognitive domains and faculties such as bodily and mental experiences, image-schemas, perception, attention, memory, categorization, abstract thought, emotion, reasoning, inferencing, etc.” (Ungerer and Schmid, 1996)

Bodily and mental experience have always played a major role in the creation of language. In (now) dead metaphors, human body parts were (and still are) used to denote non-human phenomena, e.g., *foot of the mountain*, *leg of the table*, *eye of the needle* etc. The human mind was least reluctant to use human, physical, experienced, body parts to (metaphorically) name different entities. This naming is based on “experienced metaphor” (the ‘limb’ of the table is identified with the human).

To be able to contrast English and Bosnian prepositions within cognitive linguistics, we will make use of human experience and image-schemas, along with the unavoidable feature of cognitive linguistics, metaphor. Most important to cognitive linguistics is that language reflects non-linguistic aspects of cognition i.e. one’s language can serve as a window to his/her way of perceiving and conceptualizing the world.

Image schemas

Our physical bodies interact with concepts we use in language. As noted above, embodied experience plays a major role in the creation of image schemas. What are image schemas? We could describe them as the result of our living in a three-dimensional space. The human body is in an upright direction by means of which we experience the concepts of *up* and *down*; the human

body enters physical containers, itself being one; our physical bodies live on a surface, etc. All of this (and much more) is responsible for image schemas. What follows from this, as for the ‘image’ part, is that image schemas are perceived, experienced concepts of the world. They are called schemas because they stem from repeated action. Johnson describes image schemas as “recurring, dynamic pattern of our perceptual interactions and motor programs that gives coherence and structure to our experience” (Johnson 1987: xiv). Since image schemas derive from sensory experience, we can state that they are pre-conceptual.

“Once the recurrent patterns of sensory information have been extracted and stored as an image schema, sensory experience gives rise to a conceptual representation. This means that image schemas are concepts” (Evans, Green; 2006:180).

The pre-conceptual notion of image schemas is rather difficult to grasp since these concepts are an essential part of human being, the consequence of which is that we are unaware of them. Image schemas with their inborn nature are abstract but we can prove their existence. They, moreover, give rise to concepts we live by. And these concepts produce lexical concepts.



Illustration 1

Johnson (1987) offered a list of image schemas which function as illustrated above.

CONTAINER	BALANCE	COMPULSION
BLOCKAGE	COUNTERFORCE	RESTRAINT REMOVAL
ENABLEMENT	ATTRACTION	MASS-COUNT
PATH	LINK	CENTER-PERIPHERY
CYCLE	NEAR-FAR	SCALE
PART-WHOLE	MERGING	SPLITTING
FULL-EMPTY	MATCHING	SUPERIMPOSITION
ITERATION	CONTACT	PROCESS
SURFACE	OBJECT	COLLECTION

Table 1 – Image schemas (Johnson 1987:126)

As suggested by different authors in cognitive linguistics, over two dozen of different image schemas and several image schema transformations appear regularly in people's everyday thinking, reasoning, and imagination (Johnson 1987; Lakoff 1987). All of these are physical processes, in which the human body engages, deriving meaning. What follows from this is that our everyday life and all we have learned through time, contributes to language creation. We use each of our sensory systems as 'channels' to the creation of image schemas. That image schemas aren't completely perceptual is explained by the fact that they give rise to concepts that are consciously accessible (Mandler 2004). From these consciously accessible concepts we make linguistic concepts i.e. words.

"Most of the image schemas are based on spatial relations and many basic conceptual metaphors are derived from them, such as time is space or change is motion. These spatial metaphors are most noticeable at the lexical level in expressions such as *the coming week* or *turn twenty*. At the grammatical level, spatial metaphors are particularly apparent in the use of prepositions." (Radden and Dirven; 2007:303-304)

Orientalional metaphors

Orientalional metaphors have spatial orientation. Unlike structural metaphors where one concept is structured in terms of another, orientalional metaphors organize a whole system to another one. The founders of the conceptual theory of metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson, in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), say that orientalional metaphors have basis in both our physical and our cultural experience. These two points will have to be proven both in English and Bosnian metaphors with spatial orientation. The two authors mention the English metaphor HAPPY IS UP¹, which yields in a very common English construction, "I'm feeling up today". The mentioned (orientational) metaphor has its counterpart in SAD IS DOWN, like in "I'm feeling down today". However, both of these concepts have different realizations in terms of sentences or utterances, e.g.

- (1) My spirits *rose*.
- (2) You're in *high* spirits.
- (3) I'm feeling *down*.
- (4) I fell *into* a depression.
- (5) My spirits *sank*. (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003:15).

¹ We will give concepts in capitalized letters in order to make them distinctive

The authors give the physical basis for these two concepts as: drooping posture goes along with sadness, whereas upright posture goes with happiness. However, a cultural basis is not given.

The two concepts of orientational metaphor, HAPPY IS UP and SAD IS DOWN, can also be found in Bosnian language, e.g.

- (6) Ovo mi je *podiglo* raspoloženje.
- (7) Nakon ovoga, moje samopouzdanje je *poraslo*.
- (8) *Pao* je u depresiju.
- (9) Nakon onog događaja, on je *klonuo* duhom.

All of these examples are more or less equivalents to the English examples above.

The concepts MORE IS UP and LESS IS DOWN are present in both English and Bosnian.

- (10) The number of books printed each year keeps *going up*.
 - a. Broj knjiga koji se štampa svake godine *raste*.
- (11) My income *rose* last year.
 - a. Moj plata je *porasla* prošle godine.
- (12) The number of errors is incredibly *low*.
 - a. Broj grešaka je na zavidno *niskom* nivou.
- (13) His income *fell* last year.
 - a. Njegov prihod je *opao* prošle godine.

As to check whether the two concepts match in the two languages, we have given the Bosnian translation to each sentence. What we can notice is that both languages employ orientational metaphor. Physical basis: if you add more of a substance or of physical objects to a container or pile, the level goes up. (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003:16). If we fill a bottle with water, the level of the water rises; if we mow a lawn, the level of the grass goes down. All this is physical and experienced by the human being, and therefore present in human language. Illustration 1 from above is easily applicable here; we can easily follow the path from embodiment to the lexical concept of UP and DOWN.

Now, let's check another pair of concept, HIGH (SOCIAL) STATUS IS UP and LOW (SOCIAL) STATUS IS DOWN. The examples Lakoff and Johnson offer go as follows;

- (14) She'll *rise* to the *top*.
- (15) He is at the *peak* of his career.
- (16) He's at the *bottom* of the social hierarchy.
- (17) She *fell* in social status.

Similar examples we have in Bosnian language (*On je na dnu društvene ljestvice. Njegov status u društvu je značajno opao.*), but why do we perceive society spatially? Perhaps, whenever we think of society and the different relations within, we think in form of a pyramid where the more important (or successful) are up there. It is physically also justified since the human being perceives the sky as something valuable and not easily achievable (why not back and front or left and right? Well, because each person can go back and front and left and right, but only the very successful can go up). Here it is visible why these constructions are called orientational metaphors - It is the physical experience metaphorically taken, and put into language.

Metaphor in English and Bosnian prepositions

Having given the causes and genesis of concepts of/for prepositions, we will, henceforth, be operating on them. Metaphor is frequently described as using the known to explain the unknown. Say, we don't know what Juliet is like, but when Romeo says that 'Juliet is the sun'; we will know what he means just through experience. If metaphor uses the known to explain the unknown, what is known in preposition usage, and yet what needs be explained? Known is our physical body and reality around us – it gives rise to basic meanings of prepositions; unknown is anything not physical and therefore we use the physical to explain it. Physical meanings of prepositions are basic meanings of prepositions. Conclusively, each preposition has its basic meaning in the physical sense (see Appendix). The best example for this is that we use spatial prepositions to express time.

(18) I'll be there *in* five minutes. / Biću tu *u* *za* pet minuta.

(19) He came right *on* time. / Došao je tačno *na* vrijeme.

(20) I'm going *through* hard times. / Prolaziim *kroz* teška vremena.

Isn't it that we have 'physical' prepositions for time here? Looking back at image schemas above, let's consider prepositions. The basic meaning of the English preposition *in* makes use of the image schema of CONTAINER; the basic meaning of *on* makes use of the image schema of CONTACT/SURFACE; *under* and *over* make use of the SCALE image schema, *below*, *beneath*, and *above*, too; *in front of* uses the CENTER-PERIPHERY image schema, *beside* as well. Let's consider Johnson's example which abounds in prepositions:

You wake *out of* a deep sleep and peer *out from* beneath the covers *into* your room. You gradually emerge *out of* your stupor, pull yourself *out from* under the covers, climb *into* your robe, stretch *out* your limbs, and walk *in* a daze *out of* the bedroom and *into* the bathroom. You look *in* the mirror and see your face staring *out* at you. You reach *into* the medicine cabinet, take *out*

the toothpaste, squeeze *out* some toothpaste, put the toothbrush *into* your mouth, brush your teeth *in* a hurry, and rinse *out* your mouth. (Johnson 1987: 331)

What we see in this example are prepositions metaphorically used. We said that the physical meanings of prepositions are the basic meanings, but here you wake ‘out of’ a sleep as if it were something physical. All examples have an underlying image schema concept – CONTAINER. Sleep, the bed, the room, stupor, the robe, the body, the bathroom, the mirror, toothpaste, and the mouth – all of these are metaphorically taken as containers. Now let’s look at the Bosnian equivalents for the above examples with prepositions:

- Wake *out of* a sleep – probudiš se *iz* sna
- Peer *out from* beneath the covers *into* the room – viriš *ispod* pokrivača *u* sobu
- Emerge *out of* your stupor – izlaziš *iz* stanja ukočenosti
- Pull yourself *out from* under the covers – izvlačiš se *ispod* pokrivača
- Climb *into* your robe – uvlačiš se *u* odjeću
- Stretch *out* your limbs – istežeš *u* udove
- Walk *into* the bathroom – ulaziš *u* kupatilo
- Look *in* the mirror – gledaš *u* ogledalo
- Your face staring *out* at you – tvoje lice bulji *u* tebe
- Take *out* the toothpaste – *izvadiš* pastu za zube
- Squeeze *out* some toothpaste – *iscjediš* paste za zube
- Put the toothbrush *into* your mouth – staviš četkicu *u* usta
- Brush your teeth *in* a hurry – opereš zube *nabrzinu*
- Rinse *out* your mouth – *ispereš* usta

All examples with prepositions have been italicized, in both languages. However, we frequently find that in the Bosnian examples verbs contain the preposition as their prefix (these have been both italicized and bolded). These verbs also have the underlying notion of CONTAINER as all other examples. The underlined examples use prepositions metaphorically. Some authors argue about how to settle a metaphor; we will adopt the view that wherever we have a *semantic tension*, the construction will be called a metaphorical one. A semantic tension is whenever something is used out of its basic context i.e. to explain something different. A case of semantic tension, we have in the underlined examples above.

“One of the most interesting things about image schemas is that they motivate important aspects of how we think, reason, and imagine. The same image schema can be instantiated in many different kinds of domains because the internal structure of a

single schema can be metaphorically understood.” (Gibbs and Colston, 2006:241)

In the underlined examples above the CONTAINER image schema is employed metaphorically, whereas in the other examples there is no semantic tension and no metaphor.

Time prepositions are basically metaphorical extensions of place prepositions.

- (21) Let’s meet *at* 10 o’clock. / Nađimo se *u* 10 sati.
- (22) It’ll rain *at* Christmas, they said. / Kiša će padati *na* Božić.
- (23) I saw him *on* Monday. / Vidio sam ga *u* ponedjeljak.
- (24) He was born *on* the first of July. / Rođen je prvog jula.
- (25) She was born *in* 1986. / Ona je rođena 1986-te.
- (26) He’ll arrive *in* the evening. / On će stići *navečer/uvečer.*

Time is an abstract concept so it’s easier for us to perceive it as space since we are aware about space in a physical sense. Examples (21) to (24) use the SURFACE concept to give time reference, whereas (25) and (26) use CONTAINER as the underlying concept. Both concepts are physical and spatial but here they are used to express time.

When it comes to translating prepositions one must be very careful, since they are frequently discrepant. *In* is *u* in its basic meaning, but “I’ve come *in* time” would be translated with “Došao sam *na* vrijeme”. As sentences (23) to (26) show, place prepositions metaphorically used for time are rather different from their respective synonyms in the other language. The English example in (23) makes use of the CONTACT concept whereas the Bosnian *equivalent translation* uses CONTAINER as its concept. Sentences (24) and (25) are even more difficult. The English sentences use CONTACT (23) and CONTAINER (24) whereas the Bosnian equivalent sentences don’t use prepositions at all. The accusative case in the Bosnian sentences makes prepositions redundant since they are incorporated in the accusative noun form. If we were to translate the English preposition literally (someone who isn’t native Bosnian) would search in vain. Sentence (26), again, uses different concepts (CONTAINER vs. CONTACT); and again the Bosnian preposition is ‘hidden’ as the noun’s (večer) prefix. This is of course a matter of language structure but what we have at play is metaphor.

English preposition	Basic concepts	Bosnian preposition
In	CONTAINER	U
On	SURFACE	Na
At	SURFACE	Kod
Between	CENTER-PERIPHERY	Između
From	LINK, ORIGIN	Od
To	PATH	Do

Table 2 – prepositions with their basic concepts

As can be seen in Table 2, the basic concepts of the respective prepositions *do* match, however, only in their basic concept i.e. meaning. E.g.:

(27) The children are *in* the house. / Djeca su *u* kući.

These two sentences employ the preposition in their basic meaning and henceforth we don't experience any difficulty in translation. However, if we opt for any of the metaphorical meanings of the same preposition we'd have to think twice while translating, e.g.:

(28) The train will be leaving *in* a few minutes. / Voz polazi *za* par minuta.

(29) We sold our car *in* the end. / *Na* kraju smo prodali naše auto.

(30) There isn't a cloud *in* the sky. / Nema ni olaka *na* nebu.

Whenever we have a case of preposition usage out of its basic concept, the preposition in the translation changes. This makes the translation of prepositions rather difficult. Were we to opt for the basic meaning of preposition at a hundred per cent frequency, mistakes would be unavoidable.

The basic concept of *on* is SURFACE/CONTACT, but if we use *on* out of its basic concept the Bosnian 'equivalent' preposition changes, e.g.:

(31) See you *on* Monday. / Vidimo se *u* ponedjeljak.

(32) I've just bought a book *on* economics. / Upravo sam kupio knjigu *o* ekonomiji.

(33) *On* his entry, I left. / *Po* njegovm ulasku, ja sam otišao.

At makes use of the SURFACE concept in its basic meaning, however, when used out of this context the Bosnian preposition changes, e.g.:

- (34) I bought this shirt *at* a low price. / Kupila sam ovu majicu *po* niskoj cijeni.
(35) This shop closes *at* five o'clock. / Ova prodavnica zatvara *u* pet sati.

“Through metaphor, we make use of patterns that obtain in our physical experience to organize our more abstract understanding. Understanding via metaphorical projection from the concrete to the abstract makes use of physical experience in two ways. First, our bodily movements and interactions in various physical domains of experience are structured, and that structure can be projected by metaphor onto abstract domains. Second, metaphorical understanding is not merely a matter of arbitrary fanciful projection from anything to anything with no constraints. Concrete bodily experience not only constraints the ‘input’ to the metaphorical projection but also the nature of the projections themselves, that is, the kinds of mappings that can occur across domains.” (Johnson, 1987:XV)

We have already mentioned that metaphor is used to explain the unknown by means of the known, but Johnson puts it quite clearly where metaphorical language originates from, namely, the patterns in metaphor have their roots in our physical being – a matter we stated just above. Concrete bodily experience constraints the input to metaphorical projection which is best observable in prepositions. If metaphorical language is structured in accordance with our bodily experience then prepositions of place should be the basic from which we extract other kinds of prepositions. The English preposition of place, *in*, is a basis for the metaphorical extension for the *time* preposition *in*. The reason for this is that we can experience the physical (place) preposition whereas time is an abstract concept. The same case we have with *at* and *on*, just like with the Bosnian prepositions *u*, *na* and *kod*.

We said that whenever prepositions are used in their basic meaning (now we can say the physical meaning) there is no difficulty in translation between Bosnian and English. However, metaphorical meanings of prepositions are understood differently. Metaphors have an experiential and cultural basis. Cultural differences make an English speaker perceive prepositions with metaphorical notion differently.

“In their metaphorical usages, however, spatial prepositions allow us to make finer distinctions in the abstract domains which we would not be able to make if we could not make use of the spatial metaphor.” (Radden and Dirven; 2007:303)

These ‘finer distinctions’ make the system of prepositions in one language more complex, but for the purpose of language economy it is justified. However, when one form of preposition has its meaning in different conceptual domains within one language, this makes translation more difficult since these ‘finer distinctions’ can never match to a hundred per cent.

Conclusion

In this paper we claimed that what makes prepositions difficult to translate is metaphorical language they contain. However, through the cognitive linguistics frame, we captured common basis of all human beings i.e. image schemas. Human beings are inevitably in a three-dimensional environment which is the basis for image schemas. What follows from this is that all human beings, more or less, experience similar stimuli from the outside world. Personal and cultural experience, have an impact on image schema creation, though. These experiential bases, as we have seen in Illustration 1 give rise to lexical concepts. Contrastively observed, we have come to the conclusion that both English and Bosnian prepositions remain with their respective counterparts (synonyms) in the other language. However, the further we drift away from the basic (physical meaning, as we have claimed), where the prepositions match with their image schemas, the more difficulties we have in translation. The reason for this discrepancy is metaphorical language in prepositions.

Appendix

Here we give some English prepositions with their etymology (taken from the online Oxford English dictionary (www.oxforddictionaries.com)).

1. **About** - Origin: Old English onbūtan, from on ‘in, on’ + būtan ‘outside of’ (see but)
2. **Across** - Origin: Middle English (as an adverb meaning ‘in the form of a cross’): from Old French a croix, en croix ‘in or on a cross’, later regarded as being from a- + cross
3. **After** - Origin: Old English æfter², of Germanic origin; related to Dutch achter
4. **Among** - Origin: Old English ongemang (from on ‘in’ + gemang ‘assemblage, mingling’). The -st of amongst represents -s (adverbial genitive) + -t probably by association with superlatives (as in against)
5. **Around** - Origin: Middle English: from a- ‘in, on’ + round

² Old english aefter (*behind*, after)

6. **For** - Origin: Old English, probably a reduction of a Germanic preposition meaning 'before' (in place or time); related to German für
7. **From** - indicating the point in space at which a journey, motion, or action starts
8. **Of** - expressing the relationship between a part and a whole
9. **Until** – Origin: Middle English: from Old Norse und 'as far as' + till (the sense thus duplicated)
10. **Upon** - Origin: Middle English: from up + on, suggested by Old Norse upp á
11. **Via** - Origin: late 18th century: from Latin, ablative of via 'way, road'
12. **With** - Origin: Old English, probably a shortening of a Germanic preposition related to obsolete English wither 'adverse, opposite'

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This paper will eventually claim that what underlies prepositions is metaphor. Through cognitive linguistics we will analyze cases of metaphorical usage in English prepositions. We will show in what way metaphor is responsible for frequent mistakes when translating English prepositions into Bosnian. To prove this we will use two of the basic settings in cognitive linguistics i.e. image-schemas and embodied experience.

Key words: *metaphor, cognitive linguistic*