

A Contrastive Analysis of the French and EmbóSí Prepositions: The Case Study of 'Dans' and 'Tsó'

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This contribution focuses on the comparison of the syntactic and semantic analysis of the preposition with particular emphasis on the French preposition 'dans' and the EmbóSí 'tsá'. It comes out from the discussion that the French preposition 'dans' substantiates the three semantic properties of preposition namely spatial, time and abstract features. EmbóSí 'tsá' on the contrary, instances two properties only notably spatial and time references. This analysis demonstrates that these two prepositions under discussion share the same syntactic distributions regarding their spatial and temporal properties. What distinguishes the two prepositions is the abstract and discursive property of 'dans' together with its collocations with number which is not attested in EmbóSí.

Key Words: French, EmbóSí, preposition, contrastive analysis, temporality, spatiality, abstract distribution, collocation

Introduction

The objective of this contribution is to carry out a contrastive analysis of prepositions based on an Indo-European language (French) and a Bantu language (EmbóSí). This article broadens my previous works (2006, 2011) which compares English and French prepositions as well as linguistic interference between French and EmbóSí. The paper addresses the following questions: (i) How does French or EmbóSí use prepositions to locate something in the space? (ii) What are the different usages of the prepositions 'dans' and 'tsó' in the languages under scrutiny? What are the similar and dissimilar points between the two prepositions under discussion?

1- General features on prepositions

Before embarking on the scrutiny on the contrastive analysis of the prepositions 'dans' and 'tsó', it is worth elaborating on the theoretical background on preposition. This analysis has twofold objectives. Firstly, we will be concerned with the semantics of preposition and finally on its syntactic aspects. As Catherine Chauvin (2011, p.2) writes

Most 'words', taken here in the broadest of senses, have at least several uses, and, perhaps, several meanings as well. It is the case of prepositions, and perhaps even more dramatically than in other domains, as prepositions have many uses which often turn out to be particularly difficult to deal with, classify, and ultimately, analyse.

As things stands, it comes out that prepositions are very polysemous. This polysemy is reinforced by the different lexical items that c-command

preposition. In addition to subadjacency, we should consider the context in which the word -preposition- is used. That is to say, the meaning of words is generally context-based. To quote Catherine Chauvin again (2011, p.3),

Within the enunciationist framework, prepositions are not thought to be spatial or temporal or "something else" (see below) in nature; they may have more "spatial", "temporal", or "other" uses but these are always strictly context-based and are not to be thought to be intrinsically linked to the preposition.

It appears that what is more striking in deciding on the nature of the meaning of prepositions is more the context than the preposition itself. Putting things in quite a similar way, the meaning of the preposition is immediately encoded in the co-text which covers the context and the distributional environment in which we find this preposition. This is to defend that the polysemy approach on words is one of the good ways to account for word meaning because monosemy is too restricted. In the words of Tyler and Evans (2003,p.7)

The question of how best to model the distinct meanings associated with a single lexical form has been approached from three perspectives. These are homonymy, monosemy and polysemy. [...] The position we advocate is that of polysemy. A polysemy approach suggests that the meanings associated with a spatial particle such as over are related in some fashion. [...] Our account of polysemy holds that a linguistic form is paired at the conceptual level, not only with a single meaning, but rather with a network of distinct but related meanings. Hence, the meanings associated with a particular form constitute a semantic network.

Spatial Prepositions A Case Study From French

JR Anderson



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