THE METONYMIC BASIS OF PREPOSITIONAL POLYSEMY IN OLD ENGLISH: A PRAGMATIC APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the semantics and pragmatics of the preposition “on” in Old English. I will show that deviations from its prototype were motivated by pragmatic inferences and world-knowledge. A striking feature of the deviation processes examined here is that they were triggered by metonymic operations. A salient element in the configuration of the spatial relations expressed by the prototype was modulated by several contextual factors modifying the primary relation and producing shifts in meaning. One of the main conclusions drawn from this work is that while the principles governing the distribution of the prepositions “in” and “on” in present-day English rely above all on geometric descriptions of the landmark, in Old English it was determined by pragmatic inferences and communicative constraints.

KEY WORDS: Metonymy, pragmatics, grammaticalization, semantic extension, diachronic evolution.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo examina los aspectos semánticos y pragmáticos de la preposición “on” en inglés antiguo. Mostraré que desviaciones fueron motivadas a partir del prototipo debido a inferencias pragmáticas y al conocimiento del mundo. Un rasgo llamativo de los procesos de desviación aquí examinado se base en que fueron detonados por procesos metonímicos. Un elemento focal en la configuración de las relaciones espaciales expresado por el prototipo fue modulado por varios factores contextuales que modificaron la relación primaria y produjeron cambios en el significado. Una de las principales conclusiones obtenidas de este trabajo es que, mientras los principios que gobiernan la distribución de las preposiciones “in” y “on” en inglés antiguo sustentan principalmente en descripciones geométricas del espacio, en inglés antiguo, estas estaban determinadas por inferencias pragmáticas y restricciones comunicativas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: metonimia, pragmática, gramaticalización, extensión semántica, evolución diacrónica.

1. THE ROLE OF METONYMY IN SEMANTIC EXTENSION: THE CASE OF PREPOSITIONAL SEMANTICS

Recently we have witnessed the arousal of a number of solidly founded papers that show that metonymy is a basic device in some grammaticalization processes (Cuyckens, Hopper, Lehman, Queller, Radden, Traugott and Köning). However, the role of metonymic operations in the extension of spatial categories still is quite unexplored. This is despite the fact that Herskovits as soon as 1986 already explained that the use of prepositions to categorize relationships not matching the prototype of the category was due to metonymic shifts. She acknowledged that the use of metonymy as a theoretical device to define these semantics extensions was not without problems:

> These may in general be called "metonymies", though this is often stretching the intuitive idea of metonymy, since a speaker may not be as aware of an indirect reference as he or she would be if told "the ham sandwich is waiting for his check." (56)

Herskovits is right when stating that speakers might not be aware of the existence of a case of metonymy in certain uses of prepositions. But the studies referred to above demonstrate that metonymy is a cognitive operation taking part in processes which are complex enough as to go unnoticed by the lay speaker. It is the linguist's task to identify them and describe the principles that have motivated these metonymic operations.

Even though with the advent of cognitive linguistics prepositional semantics have been thoroughly examined in a myriad of works, the views adopted have followed basically the same directions. Thus, several aspects of the behaviour of these close-class elements have been overlooked. The methodology in the study of prepositions recurs in most studies. Linguists are concerned with establishing the degree of polysemy that can be ascribed to these categories. In other words, what is at issue is whether a single meaning, abstract enough as to apply to all the senses of the category, can be found. Due to the referents of prepositions, this abstract sense is usually represented by means of a geometric abstraction. This is often compatible with a network that displays all the uses of a preposition and how they are connected between them. Abstract uses of prepositions have received less attention than physical, and their existence is explained by the consistency of topological schemata recurring in different domains (time, feelings, causality, etc.). Metaphor has been assigned a relevant role in this transference of use from the physical to other realms of experience.

Facts that have been generally neglected are: i) how the diachronic evolution of a preposition relates to the present usage of the category; and ii) the role that metonymic operations plays in the semantic extensions undergone by prepositions. The first point is particularly complex because prepositions' denotational function works differently from that of other words. Diachronic semantics shows that lexical items that refer to concrete entities may change their meaning over the years so that they can be used when referring to new realities. An example of this is the English word *car* which originally was used to refer to a cart usually pulled by horses, while now it denotes a self-propelled vehicle. But, objectively, basic spatial relations do not change in the way that objects do, nor do they stop existing. Thus, alterations in the way they are referred to is a response to changes in the way they are viewed by conceptualizers. This observation poses the first difficulty in the study of these spatial categories. The linguist must not rely so much on the objective reality, but should try to uncover the factors that mould the conceptualizers' perception of spatial scenes. To my knowledge, only Cuyckens has so far explicitly drawn attention to the fact that the connections between prepositional uses can be described by means other than metaphoric extensions. This author analyses the following examples with the preposition *for* (Cuyckens 260):

(7) I bought a new suit for my brother's wedding
(8) The dogs fought for the bone (cf. Radden 193)
(9) A certain amount must be deducted for depreciation (LDCE)

Cuyckens acknowledges with Radden that these expressions can be interpreted as an instantiation of the CAUSE IS GOAL metaphor. According to this interpretation, the landmarks of the preposition *for* are the motivation of the action and at the same time its goal. But Cuyckens convincingly argues that cause and goal occur simultaneously in these expressions, therefore, a relation of concomitance can be attributed to it. This is where the operation of the metonymy is located. Cuyckens goes further to explain that the diachronic developments undergone by certain prepositions are the result of metonymic mechanisms. As an example Cuyckens presents the case of the preposition *to* in Old English. The grammaticalization undergone by this preposition has been explained by some authors as the operation of a metaphoric operation. Thus, from the expression of ablative relations to purpose reflects the PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS metaphor. However, Cuyckens goes one step further and demonstrates that there exists conceptual concomitance between the notions of "purpose" and "physical destination." This can be read in the following sentences this author presents (Cuyckens 261):

(16) They came to our rescue
(17) They sat down to dinner
(18) We were out to breakfast
(19) I am going to be married (cf. Hopper and Traugott 82)

These examples show that there is a relation of contiguity between the purpose and the location where that purpose is to be fulfilled.

Cuycken's claim that semantic extensions can sometimes be more powerfully described by uncovering the metonymic operations that underlie them presents two obvious advantages: i) it does not deny the role played by metaphor; and ii) it establishes firm connections with the role that perception plays in conceptualization since the conceptual contiguity found in this relations mirrors contiguity of the phenomena in extra linguistic reality. This makes his model highly useful for the diachronic analysis of the preposition "on" in two fundamental ways:

1. It explains its distribution with the preposition “in” in Old English, which otherwise would remain rather obscure since there seems to be a rupture between the usage of these prepositions in that period and that in present-day English.
2. It allows the description of the diachronic evolution of the category “on.” In other words, it shows that there exists logical continuity in the usage of the category, despite the remarkable differences in usage between Old and present-day English.

2. THE STATE OF AFFAIRS IN OLD ENGLISH

An analysis of the uses of “in,” “on” and “at” in Old English shows that geometric conceptualisation is not fully operating in these prepositions’ distribution. For example, an examination of the landmarks collocated with “in,” “on” and “at” in *The Old English Version of Bede’s Ecclesiastical History* (henceforth EH) shows that large geo-physical divisions, such as nations, can appear preceded by either the preposition “in” or by the preposition “on” (Guarddon 2004). The expressions below illustrate this fact:

(1) a. *XV. Ðætte Angelðeod wæs gelaðod fram Bryttum* ***on Breotone;***
“XV. That the Angles were invited **into Britain** by the Britons:”
(Bedehead 1.8.9)

b. *Ða ferdon Peohtas* ***in Breotone****, ongunnon eardigan þa norðdælas þyses ælondes;*
“Then the Picts came **into Britain**, and began to occupy the north of this island,” (1 1.28.17)

Lundskær-Nielsen provides further evidence in the same direction. As mentioned earlier, this author analysed the years 892-900 in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, where he has found that the preposition “on” co-occurs with the name of a region on 21 occasions, while there is only one case with the preposition “in.” In the same extract, “at” occurs on 10 occasions with a name of town, while the preposition “on” occurs only 3 occasions in the same context and the preposition “in” does not occur at all in conjunction with a town in this corpus. In Lundskær-Nielsen’s examination of the usage of these prepositions in the years 1122-54 of *The Peterborough Chronicle* has found that a location in town is expressed by the preposition “in” on 7 occasions, the preposition “at” on 14 occasions and the preposition “on” on 17 occasions. From these data two fundamental facts derive: i) The knowledge schemata underlying the use of the preposition *on* in Old English were different from those that are active; and ii) They were also fewer. Only a reduction in the number of the image schemata can account for the greater flexibility in the use of the preposition as regards the selection of landmarks.

One of the main reasons for choosing EH to create our corpus is that being quite long —it is made up of five books— we have found enough occurrences of the preposition *on* to spot certain tendencies in the use of this preposition. Second, the three main topological prepositions, "in," "on" and "at," which have a rather restricted distribution are well represented in the text. This allows us to establish the selection restrictions governing the distribution of the preposition "on" in EH, which can also be extrapolated to other Old English texts.

There is a widespread assumption that prepositions are highly polysemous words and thus form extremely complex lexical classes. Their polysemy is based on their capacity to categorise domains other than the spatial. Therefore, the semantic description of a preposition is not complete if no reference is made to the temporal and abstract relationships that it can establish. However, these relations lie beyond the scope of the present paper. At any rate, due to their ontological priviledged status, the spatial uses of a preposition should be described in the first place in order to determine the metaphorical and metonymical operations that have led to further extensions of the category in other domains. The landmarks selected for the purposes of our analysis stand for a wide range of spatial categories: large geographic entities, small geographic entities, general geographic designations, buildings, containers, body parts, means of transport and imaginary places. The table below shows the catalogue of landmarks that have been used to build up our corpus:

TABLE 1. PHYSICAL LANDMARKS FROM EH

Physical landmarks		
1. *Britten* 'Britain'	8. Gallia 'Gaul'	15. *Mynster* 'monastery'
2. *Burg* 'town'	9. Hand 'hand'	16. *Neorxenawang* 'paradise'
3. *Cirice* 'church'	10. *Heofon* 'heaven'	17. *Ríce* 'kingdom'
4. *Cyst* 'coffin'	11. *Hús* 'house'	18. *Rom* 'Rome'
5. Eðel 'country'	12. *Land* 'land'	19. *Scíp* 'ship'
6. Fót "foot"	13. Mægð "province, tribe"	20. *Stow* 'place'
7. *Fyr* 'fire'	14. *Mór* 'moors'	21. *Đruh* 'coffin'

It must be noted that with some of these landmarks I have found no examples using the preposition "on," but they have been kept because, I claim, that for the semantic description of a preposition, indicating the type of landmark it collocates with is as relevant as enumerating the type of relationships that it cannot establish.

At this point, it must be noted that EH is the translation of a Latin original and one could argue about the possibility of Latin influence in the prepositional usage of the Old English translation. To check whether such dependence has biased the use of "on," I have compared all the expressions that compose our corpus with their Latin equivalents and I have not found any repeated synchronicity in this sense, for example, the Latin preposition *ad* motivating the presence of "at" in the Old English text. In his study of the case values governed by prepositions in Old English Belden also confirmed that the Latin work had not determined the choice of prepositions in EH.

3. THE INTERACTION OF PRAGMATIC STRENGTHENING AND METONYMY IN THE DIACHRONIC EVOLUTION OF THE PREPOSITION "ON"

A global semantic description of the prepositions "in," "on" and "at" can be achieved by means of one factor based in spatio-physical experience: "visual distance." This visual distance is to be understood as the separation holding between the speaker and the scene being referred to by a prepositional expression. It is argued that this extra-linguistic notion systematically motivates the semantic structure of these prepositions in two fundamental ways. First, it places these prepositions in a semantic continuum that modulates their distribution in the contexts where they are able to alternate. Second, I claim that visual distance is concomitant to the use of these prepositions in those cases where no alternation seems to be at all feasible. In order to illustrate the two points made above consider the following examples:

(2) a. I will not allow my soldiers to fight in this terrain
b. I will not allow my soldiers to fight on this terrain

(2a) suggests that the speaker is standing in the place where her soldiers are supposed to fight. The use of the preposition "in" in this example expresses a sense of containment which is not present in (2b). The use of the preposition "on" in (2b) relates to a situation in which the commander is pointing at the terrain on a map. Thus, there is a notion of contact with a bi-dimensional landmark rather than containment by a three-dimensional landmark as in (2a) The preposition "at" very often alternates with "in" to express identical scenes objectively speaking, but which are viewed differently by the speaker. This has been noted by Herskovits through the examples "Lucy is at the supermarket" and "Lucy is in the supermarket" (Herskovits 15). According to Herskovits, "If both speaker and addressee are in the supermarket, for instance, "at the supermarket" is usually inappropriate." "The train is at the bridge" and "The train is on the bridge" constitute a similar case, the former "highlights the route followed by the train, marking the bridge as a landmark" (Herskovits 15). This is definitely possible because the speaker has a *map* perspective of the relationship between the trajector and the landmark. The map perspective imposes an idealisation of that relationship, where the landmark has become a line and the trajector a point in that line. The latter example implies the existence of a visualised rather than an idealised scene, thus the speaker can account for the location of the train on the upper surface of the bridge. Given the argument I have been developing, the alternation of the topological prepositions "in," "on" and "at" does not affect the three of them but can group them in pairs according to the scene referred to. Still the existence of a case in which the three prepositions can appear providing different perspectives of a single, objectively speaking, situation implies the activation of a continuum. In this continuum "in" would represent the maximal proximity of the speaker to the spatial relationship; "at" would convey a sense of maximal distance; and on would designate an intermediate position where the landmark still keeps traits of its overall form, although in a schematic way. For the sake of clarity, see the examples below:

(3) a. Musical sand including both singing sand in the beach and booming sand in the desert
b. The zone of continual change on the beach
c. Things to do at the beach

The sentence in (3a) designates a close-up view of the beach, otherwise one would not be able to hear the sand's sound. The geo-physical change described in (3b), is tightly correlated with a distant view of the beach that allows the appreciation of its evolution through time. "At" is often used to refer to the location of an agent in a particular scenario, which does not involve, strictly speaking, the identification of a specific place, as illustrated by (3c). The on-line choice of one of these prepositions in each expression above describing location within the boundaries of the same landmark, "beach," has one fundamental consequence. This is that the concept "beach" is endowed with different configurations in each example, and that these configurations are contingent upon the preposition this landmark collocates with. Thus, I claim that the occurrence of distinct prepositions in these sentences is an example of the concept-to- utterance level of meaning construction.

When it comes to the cases in which these prepositions cannot alternate, I claim that they are tightly connected with relationships whose perception requires a close-up perspective. Put another way, speakers cannot state "The apple is in the bowl" if they are not close enough of both elements taking part in the relationship. The same can be said of "The book is on the table" or "The man is at the door." I argue that these uses where visual information is determinant in preposition choice and where not alternation is possible, because of the impossibility of imposing different perspectives on a single case of location, are primary with respect to those that give rise to alternation. This is supported by language acquisition; children are able to speak of relationships which they can see and even participate physically in —such as placing objects within containers— far before they are able to categorise idealised physical relations.

As pointed out in Section 2, the data analysed in Old English shows that the prepositions "in," "on" and "at" were able to alternate with greater flexibility in comparison to their present-day distribution. This alternation is above all found in relationships that cannot be apprehended visually, but through an idealisation of the landmark, i.e. location in geo-physical divisions (countries, town, regions, etc.). Eventually, "on" is also found in collocation with small landmarks such as receptacles, designating a relationship that in present-day English has definitely been taken on by the preposition "in."

3.1. Analysis of the Data

This analysis has been carried out in relation to the landmarks presented in Table 1. The corpus of expressions where these landmarks co-occur with the prepositions examined amounts to a total of 474 expressions. When analysing the cases of preposition alternation that run counter to present-day usage, I rejected morphological motivations since the case of the landmark —accusative vs. dative— does not correlate with any of these prepositions. I also analysed the phrasal organisation of the landmark, specifically contrasted expressions with landmarks treated generically (no determinants preceding the landmark) vs. landmarks singled out by some kind of pre-modifier. Thus, the presence of a determiner does not play any function in the distribution of these prepositions. Finally, I considered the sentential context where these prepositional expressions occur, above all I paid attention to verb type and the existence of a static —locative verbs— or dynamic scene —motion verbs. I found that all of these prepositions collocate quite freely with locative or motion verbs.

After assessing that the alternation of these prepositions could not be attributed to strictly linguistic or semantic factors, I analysed the wider context where they were inserted. In other words, I looked into higher frames of reference such as discourse dynamics. From this, quite stable patterns of behaviour arose, particularly as regards the alternation of the prepositions "in" and "on." In Old English the alternation of "in" and "on" in the expression of location in geographic entities depended upon the activation of relevant facts associated to the interior of the landmark, i.e. its internal structure versus its consideration as a plane. The relevant point was whether the speaker took a remote or a close-up perspective of a situation. As regards to the preposition "on," it is certainly not coincidental that it occurs in all the expressions where the narrator takes a remote perspective of the facts and, thus, of their location. One use-type identified can be designated "enumeration of events". In fact, when lists of events are provided their location is systematically expressed with "on." There is a section of the *Ecclesiastical History* known as *Headings*, there the contents of all the chapters that make up the Five Books are summarised in a telegraph-like style. In the case of *Briten* I have found four examples with the preposition "on" and none with "in." The expression below illustrates this fact:

(4) *XI.* Ðæt se arwurþa wer Swiðbyrht **on Breotone**, Wilbrord æt Rome biscopas wæron Fresna ðeode gehalgode (BedeHead 5.22.32).

"XI. That the venerable Swithberht in Britain **and Wilbrord at Rome were consecrated as bishops for Friesland."**

3.2. Identification of Operative Metonymic Shifts

Before the examples examined showed that a metonymic shift was responsible for the distribution of these prepositions in Old English. I assessed one fundamental fact: All the relationships where alternation occurred expressed location within the confines of a bounded landmark. Thus, the question that prompted my line of analysis was what configurational features of the canonical relationships denoted by "on" were transferred to cases such as (4). Finding an adequate answer to this question was pivotal to avoid accepting the traditional view that arbitrariness is one fundamental feature characterising lexical organisation.

It can be argued that the preposition "at" has relatively stuck to quite stable patterns, a very low percentage of the expressions with the preposition with "at" exhibited differences with respect to present-day usage. Regarding the expressions where the preposition "in" was found, they were quite consistent as regards present-day use. Thus, the only behaviour that proved different from the perspective of present-day usage is that of the preposition "on"; taking on uses that currently belong to the range of relations coded by the preposition "in," such as location within the confines of a building.

The use of the preposition "on" in present-day English is accepted as being regulated by configurational properties of the landmark with which it collocates. Prototypically, a salient aspect of the landmarks associated with "on" is a surface which is in contact with and supports the landmark. Most often the landmark is also bounded but these boundaries are not salient, in Langacker's terms we could say that they are not profiled by the meaning of the preposition. On the other hand, an important aspect of spatial scenes coded by the preposition "in" in present-day English is the notion of a boundary. Therefore, all the expressions where we find an "anomalous" use of the preposition "on," this preposition is found coding spatial scenes where the trajector is located within the confines of a bounded landmark; even in cases where objectively these landmarks have perceptually salient limits, such as buildings. Thus, the point is how these two types of location in the interior of an entity are different so that they are conceptualised by distinct lexemes: "in" vs. "on."

The examples on which I have focused my attention, as (1a) and (1b) show, are apparently identical as regards the spatial scene being described. The only difference between them, as intimated above, is related to the narrative context where they are inserted. In other words, even though from the physical spatial point of view they might constitute identical scenes, they are different spatial relations at the conceptual level.

The fact that we find the preposition "in" those parts of the story where a detailed account of the facts being narrated is provided indicates the existence of a close vantage point. This is tightly correlated to a great deal of visual information. Prototypically, many physical entities with an interior are made of opaque substances that obstruct visual access. Thus, I assume that the vantage point of the speaker is as close to the scene as to be able to "see" the contents contained by the landmark. From an experiential position, this situation leads to two situated inferences. First, visual access is concomitant to physical proximity. Second, full access to the interior of a container is possible when the speaker is within the interior space of the container, and this implies that the speaker must "pass within" the boundaries of the landmark. The reason for using the notions *see* and *pass* between inverted commas is that the perception and motion denoted by these terms does not have to actually happen. That is, they can be the result of mental navigation or evocation of a scene, as when Bede tells the events occurring in a monastery or a battle field, say.

The preposition “on” is generally used in the expression of location in the interior space of a landmark when no details of the events occurring or the objects placed within the confines of the landmark are provided. This indicates the absence of visual information being activated in the account of facts. This is the case of location being used as simple data, for instance in the case of bare biographical information where are the deeds of a character what is at issue rather than the places or dates related to the events. In these cases the facts happening within the confines of the bounded landmark are given a matter-of-fact cursory treatment. No description of the development of facts or of the entities contained by the landmark is provided, thus the boundary does not constitute a relevant factor either at the experiential or the contextual level. Furthermore, the perspective of the speaker appears to be strongly related to a sense of distance. The relations so encoded by the preposition “on” are close to the uses of the preposition “at” in combination with certain geographic entities such as towns, where no inner-perspective of the speaker is presented and no details of the internal configuration of the landmark is provided.

I take sides with the view that lexicon usage is systematically motivated. As revealed by the voluminous cognition literature, in a primary stage of their development, infants conceptualise facts that are present in their experiential context. Only later are they able to conceptualise abstract and idealised situations. This is in consonance with the hypothesis that meaning extension follows a parallel process. Applied to my study, prepositions in a first place would be used to encode relationships that resulted from the speakers’ interaction with their physical environment. This interaction in turn gave rise to situated inferences, that allowed for the use of these prepositions in cases where no physical interaction takes place.

In the encoding of the location of the trajector in the interior space of the landmark two basic factors are involved: i) the speaker’s vantage point; and ii) the conceptual configuration of the landmark. It must be noted that I am using the notion of vantage point in a extended sense, not referring simply to the physical position of the speaker of the spatial scene denoted by a expression. Instead, I mean the position that the speaker adopts when conceptualising and then linguistically encoding the scene. It is worthwhile noting how these two factors interact. The closer the vantage point is the more features of the landmark configuration can be apprehended by the speaker, among these features is the relevance of boundaries. This manifests in the speaker interaction with the trajector and the landmark. For instance, let us say that the speaker is faced with a small container such a box, she will not be able to know what is inside the box if she is not close enough so that she can access visually the contents of the box from above. In this fashion, the conceptualiser avoids the blockage to visual perception effected by the boundaries of the box. If the speaker is within a room, she is fully aware of the contents of the room, thus, she is aware of the interior structure of the space delimited by the boundaries of the landmark. She would not be able to know the features of the interior of that room if the speaker happened to be located outside the boundaries of that room. On the other hand, the experiential consequences of the relationships encoded by the preposition "on" do not imply the salience of limits. Neither is a close vantage point required to assess that such relationship holds. For instance, to see that there is a jar on a table the speaker does not have to be as close as to see the contents of a box, say. Similarly, location within the limits of a prairie is usually expressed by means of the preposition "on." This does not mean that a prairie is an unbounded space. One could be staring at a prairie from a place other than the prairie. But even in the case that we are not within the confines of the prairie we can have visual access to the entities located within the space that constitute the prairie. Thus, those boundaries are not salient as regards the vantage point of the speaker. By vantage point I do not refer merely to the position of the speaker with respect to the boundaries of the landmark —within or outside— but also the distance of the speaker regarding trajector and landmark. In order to illustrate this claim consider the presence of two horses on a prairie, they could be spotted even from a considerable distance.

Given the argument I have been developing, the bodily experience of the prepositions "on" gives rise to a fundamental situated inference which is the absence of boundaries delimiting an interior space and as such the absence of an internal structure to be known. This situated inference becomes a new meaning attached to the preposition "on" through pragmatic strengthening. But this situated inference would not be transferred to idealised relationships such as location in countries or regions if it were not for the operation of a metonymy. This metonymy is contingent upon the fact that the more idealised a spatio-physical relationship is, the weaker the conceptualiser's bodily interaction with that scene is. The fact that our bodily interaction with an idealised spatial scene is more restricted is concomitant with a lesser number of active image-schemata involved in that relationship. This accounts for the greater flexibility found in the alternation of prepositions in map-relationships.

Beitel, Gibbs and Sanders sought to show that there exist tight connections between bodily experiences and linguistic meaning. Their experimental investigation focuses on how image schemas could help to predict relatedness between different uses of the preposition "on." They demonstrated that the bodily experience of the relationships encoded by the preposition "on" gave rise to five basic image-schemata that through situated inferences, motivated the figurative uses of "on." These image-schemata are: SUPPORT, PRESSURE, CONSTRAINT, COVERING and VISIBILITY, and it can be argued that they are active in the spatial scenes that constitute part of our bodily kinaesthetic and sensorimotor experiences. Put in another way, with the primary uses of the category. On the other hand, idealised relationships, such as location in large geo-physical divisions do not involve strictly speaking bodily interaction but situated inferences derived from that interaction. Therefore, I claim that most of the image-schemata that initially gave rise to the situated inferences motivating situations such as (4) are no longer required. As explained above, in these map idealisations of spatial scenes only VISIBILITY is an active image-schema in the distribution of the prepositions "in" and "on."

Thus, I propound the existence of two subcategories ON_1 and ON_2. That are characterised by obvious different features from the experiential and conceptual point of view. ON_1 has the status of a sanctioning sense or "impulsion" in Vandeloise's terms, and originates ON_2 through a metonymic shift. In order to illustrate this claim, the anatomy of the process can be anagrammed as follows:

ON_1 [SUPPORT, PRESSURE, CONSTRAINT, COVERING, VISIBILITY] > ON_2 [VISIBILITY]

The metonymic mapping motivating the extension of the category is one example of CATEGORY FOR MEMBER, since "on" stands metonymically for only one of the schemata that are active in its primary bodily experiential use. The use of ON_2 is licensed on the basis of one of the schemata of ON_1, VISIBILITY, becoming dominant in the novel meaning. The fact that diachronic evolution has brought about almost the total disappearance of ON_2 can be the result that maybe the schemata which became dominant in this use is not one of the most active in the meaning of ON_1 and other figurative uses as the study of Beitel, Gibbs and Sanders demonstrates (1997: 248). In their experiment, VISIBILITY was rated the third more important image schema, after SUPPORT and PRESSURE. It can be hypothesised that this fact and also the inexistence of other dominant schemata from ON_1 has had as a consequence that the use of ON_2, which was so prominent in Old English was progressively losing ground in favour of the preposition "in."

4. CONCLUDING COMMENTS, REMAINING PUZZLES

Recent studies have uncovered the role of metonymy as a mechanism that adapts and extends primary senses of a category to produce new related senses giving rise to the phenomenon of polysemy. As noted in the foregoing discussion, I have analysed the usage of the prepositions "in," "on" and "at" in EH in order to shed some light on the factors that ruled the distribution of the preposition "on" with the other two. From this analysis, two pivotal conclusions can be drawn: i) Greater flexibility in preposition use is found in those relationships in which speakers' perspective is allowed a greater role; and ii) The usage of prepositions in the modulation of perspective, is derived from image-schemata active in their conceptualisation of scenes perceived at a close distance. The reduction of these image-schemata in the description of idealised spatial relations is considered as a case of semantic extension based on metonymic shifts. A fact that remains to be accounted for and thus can prompt further research in the subject is the definition of the contexts where this extended use of the preposition "on" started to disappear. This would also explain the reasons why its alternation with the preposition "in" has been relegated to a few marginal situations in present-day English.

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