Prepositions as Means of Expressing Spatial Relationships in English and Spanish

Tomás Jiménez Juliá

1 On the concept of preposition

Both English and Spanish grammars tend to work with a concept of preposition that is more implicit than explicit. There are monographs on the preposition that do not define it at any time (Lindstromberg 1988). Other texts focus on unearthing differences with other particles (Halliday 1985: 188-189, Bosque, 1989: Chap. 10) or, on the contrary, on highlighting the oneness of all particles (Jespersen 1924: 88). When they are defined, tautologies (Biber et al. 1999) or vagueness (Academia 2010) abound. Huddleston / Pullum (2002: 598) assume a definition which they qualify as ‘traditional’, but which includes the essential aspects of the category and which, with slight variations, I shall employ as valid for our practical purposes, although emphasising their analytical, grammaticalised nature, and dispensing for the moment with their ‘guiding’ character of case. More specifically:

(1) A preposition is a grammaticalised, morphologically indivisible form, bound to a nominal unit in order to analytically indicate its subordinate nature to another constituent and to inform on the latter's semantic value, its syntagmatic function, or both.

To which we can add that the more grammaticalised a preposition is, the lower the semantic value it provides and the higher its role as a syntagmatic marker will be.

---

1 The present work forms part of the Estudo contrastivo da expresión das relacións lóxicas en alemán e castelán project, funded by the Directorate General for Research, Department of Economy and Industry, Government of Galicia (INCITE09 244 133PR).

2 “Prepositions are links which introduce prepositional phrases” (Biber et al. 1999: 74).

3 “Las preposiciones son palabras invariables y casi siempre átonas que se caracterizan por introducir un complemento, que en la tradición gramatical hispánica se denomina término” (Academia 2010: 557).
2 Preposition vs. syntactic construction

The principal distinguishing feature of the definition of preposition that I work with here, with respect to the most common one, is the emphasis on its character of grammaticalised, morphologically indivisible unit. Indeed, in order for a unit to be considered a preposition, it must have been lexicalised as such; i.e. it cannot be analysed in parts which correspond to a constructive pattern that is productive in the language or which may become independent from the construction itself. The difference between a lexicalised preposition as such and a syntactical (adverbial) structure can be illustrated in Spanish with junto a and cerca de, respectively, both translatable as ‘near’. Given that both cover an expressive gap which can be incorporated into a certain relational paradigm, the easiest thing would be to simply include them in the categorial paradigm of prepositions. Nonetheless, they clearly have different natures and are in different phases regarding their fixing as units: the components of junto a form a unit from which the form a cannot be separated, as in Spanish there is no adverb junto which can be used as such. The form cerca de, however, is the association of an adverb (cerca) and a preposition which introduces a modification into this adverb. The form cerca is perfectly autonomous as a tonic unit, and only when a spatial specification is required does the preposition de (+ NP) appear. Thus, while we have (2), but not (3), both (4) and (5) are perfectly habitual:

(2) Los Iruretagoiena se situaron [[junto a]p la puerta de acceso al mercado]PP
(3) *Los Iruretagoiena se situaron [junto (a)]adv
(5) Estaba [cerca]adv cuando el Ferrari se detuvo

Naturally, given the gradual nature of grammaticalisation and the possibility of apparently autonomous uses in specific contexts, there are cases in which the scope of grammaticalisation gives rise to doubts, but in general, the aforesaid criterion (constituent forms having no autonomous use) is the yardstick in Spanish for detecting whether we are dealing with a preposition or whether it is a composition of a synchronically active adverbial form and modifier introduced by a preposition.

---

4 For an account of these cases and how to deal with them (Cfr. Jiménez Juliá / Lübke 2013: § 1.3.2).
5 And, in the case of units originating from nouns, no possible use as a determiner.
As we shall go on to see, Spanish expresses much of what English expresses prepositionally through adverbial constructions, as its typological trends have not required it to maintain such a rich, comprehensive, prepositional system as the Germanic languages.

3 English and Spanish prepositional systems

In line with the above, we shall say that the difference between the English and Spanish prepositional systems is that the former has much richer and more precise oppositions, while the latter requires other means to express similar distinctions. Let us consider the following examples:

(6) He goes and sits on the floor to one side
(7) Nobody else was in the room
(8) Mr. Page, was appointed a lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Hull
(9) We expect you to make the most of these opportunities which exist within the Ministry of Defence

The different prepositions in italics show four ways of indicating a clearly differentiated spatial relationship. In English one would be hard pressed to find a preposition which incorporates all these values and acts as a wild card, as the spatial expression system itself, based on prepositional uses, requires these distinctions to be maintained, just as a Romance language, except in contexts of neutralisation, cannot obviate the difference between a masculine and feminine noun, as is habitual in English. The most natural translation of (6-9) is (10-13):

(10) Va y se sienta en el suelo hacia un lado
(11) Nadie más estaba en la habitación
(12) El Sr. Page fue nombrado profesor del departamento de filosofía en la universidad de Hull
(13) Esperamos que aproveches bien estas oportunidades que se ofrecen en el Ministerio de Defensa

As can be seen, the English opposition of on/in/at and, in this case, even within, cannot be specified prepositionally in Spanish. Naturally, every speaker of Spanish is aware that en casa and en el tejado are two spatially

---

6 Unless indicated otherwise, the English examples are taken from the British National Corpus (BYU-BNC).
different situations, but the language does not feel the need to specify the difference prepositionally, allowing the context to clarify the exact content of the generic *en*.

Does this mean that Spanish lacks the *linguistic* resources to make the same distinctions as English? Of course not. As I have just pointed out above, when so required, Spanish, like any language, can specify anything, but to do so, it has to resort to syntactical constructions, fundamentally adverbial, alluded to above in § 2. (6) probably lacks a natural alternative, since although ‘sentarse *en el suelo*’ means ‘sentarse *sobre el suelo*’, it is not a habitual standard option; nor does (8) have a replacement, except by altering the type of relationship through the preposition *de*. Translations specifying the sense of the prepositions (7) and (9), although highly redundant in Spanish, would be:

(14) Nadie más estaba *dentro de* la habitación
(15) Esperamos que aproveches bien estas oportunidades que se ofrecen *dentro de* / *en el marco de* (e)l Ministerio de Defensa

That is, using more or less standardised syntactic constructions, but which are not lexicalised as prepositions.

But we shall now go on to examine the second great difference between the spatial expression systems in English and Spanish; and, once again, we shall resort to examples:

(16) I believe that none of these directors would be *in* on the board if they weren’t invited there by yourself
(17) Some people even leave radios on *in* the house
(18) Where do you want me to go? (…) Come on *in* the kitchen
(19) Young victims from all over the Ukraine and far beyond came *in* and *out* of Makarenko’s institution
(20) Let me *in* here, I know I’ve been here, let me into your heart (George Harrison, *I’d have you anytime—All things must pass*)

In (16-20) one single form, *in*, has been used with a similar semantic value in all cases, but with different grammatical values. The Spanish translation

---

7 The same can be said of prepositions used with non-spatial values, such as *a* or *de*, (Cfr. Jiménez /Lübke. 2013: § 2.4.2).

8 Other contexts would admit specification with *sobre* more easily: specifically, those in which marked information is expressed (*sentarse *sobre una alfombra mullida, / sentarse sobre una tabla de pinchos*), or when the spatial situation is not contextually clear (*se tumbó sobre la yerba / se tumbó entre la yerba*).
in each case must forego this uniformity of form and resort to different resources which distance it from the systematicity of English. Possible translations of the phonic and semantically invariable, though grammatically diverse, \textit{in} would be as follows:

(21) Creo que ninguno de estos directores estaria \textit{∅} en la Junta …
(22) Alguna gente incluso dejan las radios encendidas \textit{en/dentro de} la casa
(23) ¿Dónde quieres que vaya? Ven \textit{a} la cocina
(24) Jóvenes víctimas de toda Ucrania y de más allá \textit{entraban y salían} …
(25) Déjame \textit{entrar} aquí …

The content of the adverb in (16) would be included in the interpretation of the corresponding Spanish verb (estaria = estaria dentro). Moreover, the preposition \textit{on}, which introduces the locative and is translatable only by \textit{en}, would make a specification such as that of the English \textit{in} impossible, as both would be translated by \textit{en}. Only through the use of an adverb (estaria dentro de la junta) would it be possible to reproduce the sense of the form \textit{in} in English, but at the expense of giving meaning to a sequence that is highly marked and different from the original English.

In (22) we could opt for the general stative locative preposition in Spanish, \textit{en}, or for the adverbial construction \textit{dentro de}. The latter, however, would sound somewhat strange, since in Spanish \textit{dentro de} implies a space clearly delimited from the outside (e.g. within a cupboard, inside a closed room, etc.).

The use of \textit{en}, the general translation of \textit{in}, to indicate direction has disappeared, replaced by the even more generic \textit{a}. Hence, the translation of (18) to Spanish requires a different preposition.

The translations of (19) and (20) have in common the fact that the spatial content expressed by \textit{in} is integrated in the verb, in line with the well documented Romance tendency toward expressing \textit{path} integrated into a certain number of verbs of motion. Hence, no spatial particle is required. The difference between (19) and (20) is that in (19) what is translated is the verbal form \textit{came in} (‘entrar’), while in (20) it is Spanish which has to introduce a new verb, when in English original the adverb alone suffices to express the notion of movement towards the interior: \textit{let me in} is transformed into ‘déjame \textit{entrar}’ and never into what would be a translation of the words (and not of the sequence) ‘déjame dentro’\textsuperscript{9}.

\textsuperscript{9} Given the Romance languages' reticence towards resultative constructions, the latter sequence is only possible if it expresses a stative situation and never
(16-20) are merely a sample of the productivity in English of a systematic resource that can act as an adverb (16), as a preposition (17, 18) or as a verbal particle (19, 20), conserving in all cases its spatial value, as opposed to the total absence of this systematicity in Spanish, which leads to a certain degree of diversity in resources required to translate it.

The difference between prepositional uses in English and Spanish illustrated above can be explained more fittingly if we describe the paths of both prepositional systems and the functional motivations which underlie them.

3.1 The prepositional system of English.

It is a known fact that proto-Indo-European locative adverbial forms, initially unique, tended to become set and grammaticalised according to contexts, it being possible to distinguish between free forms, which modified predications, which we call 'adverbs'; forms that characterised names and nominal phrases, which we call 'adpositions', initially postpositions (Delbrück. 1893: 643-774) and later prepositions; and those which characterised the verb directly, which we generically refer to as ‘preverbs’, and which already showed different degrees of integration in ancient times (Meillet-Vendryes. 1924: §§ 445 and ff. and 751 and ff., Mendoza. 1998: 19 and ff. 17 and ff.). The origin of these units is unique, and only syntagmatic specialisation and the grammaticalisation thereof resulted in different categorial forms which would go on to acquire semantic values far removed from their initial ones. Latin forms such as:

(26) ante aut post pugnare (Adverb: ‘to fight in front of or behind’)
(27) praecurrere ante omnes (Preposition: ‘to run before everyone’)
(28) ne imitatio iudicium antecederet (Preverb –prefix–: ‘to prevent imitation overriding good sense’)\(^{10}\)

attest the co-existence of all three forms. In the Germanic languages, and particularly in English, the rich inventory for spatial expression that gradually formed was conducive to their forms often being used in predications of movement to signal the path, preventing them from falling into disuse, as occurred to a great extent in the Latin-based Romance languages. The exhaustive use of prepositions as semantic specifiers would also endow them

---

\(^{10}\) Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory*: II, 5, 26.
with great lexical capacity, with the resulting possibility of their being qualified and modified, in a way that is totally absent in the Spanish preposition. And it was this exhaustive use of specifiers which led the Germanic languages to develop new forms, such as verbal particles which modify the meaning of the verb, either as components of the so-called phrasal verbs in English, or as separable particles in German.

Nonetheless, what interests us here is not so much isolating the different categories which emanate from this spatial specification as highlighting the non-existence of something with similar behaviour in Spanish, and the Romance languages in general, and, more specifically, the difference in systematicity and the extent to which these adverbial units are used in relation to expressing the same content in Spanish. In § 4. we shall see a brief comparison of the spatial preposition inventories in both languages. But first, we shall examine the state of the system for expressing local content in Spanish.

3.2 Spanish prepositions

The situation described above for English is not unique in older phases of modern languages. A marked trend in the functional distribution of these specifiers when modifying a verb was that of integration into the same as a prefix to form an immovable lexical unit. This is clearly shown by the trajectory from Latin in cases where a form such as sub modifies the verb ire to indicate its path and ends up integrated in the same, forming the verb subire (Sp. subir ‘to go up’), without the speaker being aware that it is a compound verb. This tendency, driven to a great extent by the learned language, also appeared in languages of the Germanic branch. In his classic study, Kennedy (1920) resorts to the no less classic study by Curme (1914) to postulate the existence of a gradual change in use from early English “from the verb with inseparable prefix to the combination where the particle or so-called separable prefix follows the verb in the sentence” (Kennedy. 1920: 11).12

11 Cfr. Eng. The railway station is [[[quite]Mod [near]P[Head]]PN[here]]PN. In Spanish, a preposition can never be modified, although the prepositional phrase can be modified globally. In Sp. Eso es algo [[[totalmente]Mod [sin sentido]P[Head]]PN] is possible, but not Eso es algo *[[[totalmente]Mod [sin prep]P[Head]]PN [sentido]].

12 According to Kennedy (1920: 11-12), until the 15th Century, Old English texts exhibited predominantly synthetic forms, like those of Latin and the Romance languages. These forms, however, were learned and of foreign influence, while
The progressive abandonment of synthetic forms (such as the Latin *exeo* or *subire*) which until then had given rise in the language to fixed forms such as *forgive, foreshadow, outface, outnumber, overtake, overthrow, understand, undertake* and *withstand*, among others, marked a far-reaching change of tendency. Thus, while English opted for more ‘popular’ solutions (*Cfr.* note 12), generalising the use of specifiers characteristic of the spoken language, as opposed to the literary tendencies of foreign influence which favoured inseparable prefixation, Spanish and the Romance languages in general continued with the integrating prefixal tendency, among other reasons, because Latin had clearly staked out a pathway in that direction and there were no instances of the popular use of separable forms like those existing among the speakers of Germanic languages.

This tendency toward the integration of specifiers as prefixes to form ‘directional’ verbs (*subire, exire, intrare, introducere, intromittere*, etc.), as well as many more with non-spatial values (*revolvere, deducere, contradicere, explicare, commutare*, etc.), resulted in an inertia of lexical creation totally unrelated to the separable adjunction so characteristic of Germanic languages. The result was the disappearance of a large part of the analytic systems expressing the *path* in Latin, since a great deal of the members thereof only operated as verbal prefixes, and not as prepositions. Units such as *circa, cis, ex, extra, infra, intra, iuxta, per, post, prae, pro, sub, supra, ultra*, which contributed to a spatial system rich in oppositions, ceased to be prepositions. Of the early adverb-prepositions, none remain with their dual value and, in their place, a set of new forms entered the Spanish preposi-

---

13 This integration of the expression of the *path* and not just the *path* into the lexical form of the verb has been considered by authors such as Talmy (1985, 2000) and Slobin (1996, 2004) as being characteristic of the so-called *Verb-framed languages.*
tional inventory, the majority devoid of spatial value, and without observing systematic oppositions such as those we see in Latin. Forms such as bajo, desde (recreation, after having lost ex) hacia, hasta, para, por, según or other subsequent ones (durante, mediante, excepto, salvo, como, donde, cuando …) filled the inventory with forms other than the initially spatial and oppositive pattern we find in Latin or, where applicable, in English.

As a legacy of the dynamics of Latin, in the Romance languages the verbal modification would need to be either integrated lexical modification (sub-ir, ‘to go from below’), with forms inherited from Latin, or syntactical modification (ir [arriba]ADV / ir [hacia arriba]VP / *[ir hacia ñ]), with ‘free’, non-grammaticalised adverbial specifiers, which Spanish has not needed to incorporate into its grammatical system of prepositions\(^\text{14}\). Spanish prepositions, and Romance prepositions in general, would be divided into a highly grammaticalised subset (a, de, en; to a lesser degree con, por), with values of a syntagmatic marker more than as a semantic specifier, and another, much more heterogeneous one, of post-Latin creation, with a wide range of systems, but with the common denominator of responding to the features referred to in (1); i.e., having been formed analytically, morphologically indivisible and dependent on nominal units in which they mark their subordinate character and, to a greater or lesser extent, their semantic value or specific syntagmatic function\(^\text{15}\).

4 Prepositional oppositions in English and Spanish. A brief comparison

Spatial prepositions are habitually classified according to four, unequally productive axes, which refer to the spatial sense indicated. These four axes are (a) the situation where the term of the preposition is located, or, using the Latin term, ubi prepositions; (b) the place toward which it is moving, or quo prepositions; (c) the place from which it originates, or unde prepositions; and, finally, (d) the place through which it passes, or qua prepos-

\(^{14}\) In a sense, Spanish finds itself in a phase similar to that described by Kennedy (1920) as a prelude to the creation of phrasal verbs in English.

\(^{15}\) For an overview of the value of Spanish prepositions, it worthwhile consulting López (1972), Brea (1985), López García (1990), De Bruyne (1999) and Pavón Lucero (1999). Despite the time elapsed, the text by Luque Durán (1973) remains useful. For purely descriptive purposes, the text by Butt-Benjamin (1988) is particularly interesting for a contrastive overview.
tions. For the purposes of illustration, in the present work I shall focus solely on *ubi* prepositions, which correspond to a great extent with the *quo* prepositions when used with verbs of motion, leaving the less numerous *unde* and *qua* prepositions for another occasion.

With regard to the *ubi* prepositions, there are two types of systematicity present in rich systems, such as the English one, and absent in those which have gradually lost this richness. The first is that relative to the number itself of their spatial oppositions. English has distinctions which in Spanish must be expressed outside the prepositional system, the upshot of which is that any comparison of both systems will show a significant imbalance. The second is the correlation between *ubi* and *quo* prepositions, which are regular and predictable in languages such as English, and much less so in languages such as Spanish.

### 4.1 *ubi* spatial oppositions

Schematically, the rich systematicity of English with regard to *ubi* prepositions, and its contrast with Spanish, can be seen in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VALUE</th>
<th>INNER SPACE IMPLIED</th>
<th>HORIZONTAL AXIS</th>
<th>VERTICAL AXIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lang</td>
<td>Eng</td>
<td>Sp</td>
<td>Eng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>within</td>
<td>dentro de</td>
<td>behind</td>
<td>tras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inside</td>
<td></td>
<td>beside</td>
<td>junto a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>off</td>
<td>fuera de</td>
<td>beyond</td>
<td>∅</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outside</td>
<td></td>
<td>opposite</td>
<td>frente a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 1.1. *UBI* PREPOSITIONS IN ENGLISH**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VALUE</th>
<th>PROXIMITY</th>
<th>MORE THAN ONE REFERENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lang</td>
<td>Eng</td>
<td>Sp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>near</td>
<td>junto a</td>
<td>cerca de</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by</td>
<td>en</td>
<td>entre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at</td>
<td></td>
<td>amid / amidst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>around</td>
<td>(por)</td>
<td>alrededor de</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| TABLE 1.2. UBI PREPOSITIONS IN ENGLISH (2) |

In English, the field implying a closed space has up to five prepositions: three for internal situations (*in, within, inside*) and two for external situations (*off, outside*). However, for the first three, Spanish has one single preposition (*en*), with the aggravating factor that, as we have already seen in (6) and (8), *en* also translates *on, at, and even over, above and up*, as well as some cases of *by*. (9) and (29)-(33) have their natural, and in prepositional terms only, translation with *en*

(29) But there were still some people *inside* the room
(30) He’s got pimples all *over* his face
(31) with The Dude *written above* a cartoon of a man holding a (...) surf board
(32) I was *up* the park this morning with the dog
(33) I (...) stood *by* the corner, embarrassed

The same can be said of the vertical axis: the four prepositions which designate different aspects of a situation vertically higher than a reference point (*on, over, above, up*) can be summarised in Spanish with just one, *sobre*, along with the aforementioned generic wild card *en*.

(34) After throwing the plates *on* the table
(35) The most basic needs we all have is to have a roof *over* our heads
(36) It had been parked on a hill *above* the park in Newport, Gwent
(37) There was one single window set about seven feet *up* the wall

And something similar occurs with the five prepositions that designate the situation of being lower than the reference point (*down, under, underneath, beneath, below*), which have only one preposition which translates them

---

16 *up,* usually has a more natural translation as an adverb when used with verbs of motion, as is true for *down,* although the latter preposition is translated as an adverb in cases of both direction and situation (*Cfr.* (42)).
The prepositional use of *down* is usually translated by means of an adverb (*abajo*) (*Cfr.* the translation of (42) as (43)), and with the peculiarity that in these cases the generic *en* cannot be used without totally losing the reference to the situation on the vertical axis.

(38) Brenda if I’ve got black circles *under* my eyes do not be surprised
(39) One day when, quietly sitting *underneath* an apple tree, …
(40) Gilgamesh attempted to achieve immortality by seeking and harvesting a briar plant which grew *beneath* the ocean.
(41) It was just a few inches *below* the surface.
(42) The car was *down* the road.
(43) El coche estaba carretera *abajo*

This imbalance is also present in the proximity axis, where the three English prepositions are divided among the lexicalised prepositional form *junto a*, which can translate *near* (44) and many cases of *by* (spatial) (*Cfr.* (33) or (45)):

(44) My children still play in rooms *near* my attic
(45) Go and sit *by* the window

_Around_ and the more archaic (in spatial uses) *about*, have no exact prepositional translation in Spanish, although an equivalent can often be given by _por_ (of the _qua_ type):

(46) Roads _around_ the site were sealed off
(47) She was moving _about_ the room now, balancing painfully but stoically on her high heels.

*En*, for its part, is the habitual translation of *at* (8), and of spatial cases of *by*, as in (33) and, losing information, it may even translate *near*.

Along the diverse reference axis, the three differentiated prepositions (*between, among, amid*) have only one prepositional translation in Spanish (*entre*):

(48) Placed *between* the lake and the sea, Mar Estang is perfect for water lovers.
(49) *Among* the trees were boulders heaped together, piled and scattered
(50) The mist cleared a little, and we found ourselves *amid* sheep pastures…

Only in the horizontal axis does there seem to be any sort of balance between the two languages: of the five English prepositions (*before, behind, beside, beyond, opposite*) only *beyond* lacks a similar preposition; the others have equivalences, either with Latin prepositions conserved as such (*ante, tras*) or with lexicalised forms (*junto a, frente a*). It should be stressed that the preposition *before* has few spatial uses, being replaced in
the majority of the translations by ante/delante de for the adverbial phrase
in front of. In any case, as spatial uses of before can be confirmed, even
though they are restricted, I shall keep it in the general scheme:

(51) A tall, sculpted chair was brought into the room and placed before the altar

It should be borne in mind that the lack of equivalences between English
and Spanish prepositions is more the result of quantitative matters (lack of
internal divisions in Spanish in fields that are diversified in English) than of
a genuinely different spatial conception, such as the one we can see in
German, with the units her/hin. The relevant aspect of the Spanish spatial
expression system is that this paucity in the inventory of prepositions is
offset by the abundant use of adverbial phrases which, if, on one hand, fill
in the gaps of preposition, on the other, co-exist with them, with an advan-
tage in terms of frequency of use for spatial expression, at least in the stan-
dard language. This is what occurs with ante/delante de, tras/detrás de,
junto a/al lado de, frente a/enfrente de, sobre/encima de, bajo/debajo de,
where the adverbial phrase with a modifier introduced by de is used more
frequently when dealing with spatial content, and is the only possible form
when followed by the first- or second-person singular pronouns:

(52) Es que a mí me cogió también mi madre un día detrás de (/?tras)

(53) Estaba detrás de (/?tras) mi, sólo a unos pasos de distancia

In other cases the adverbial phrase has no exact prepositional equivalent: as
a translation of near, the preposition junto a may be equivalent to the ad-
verbial phrase cerca de, but only the latter covers all the cases of the corre-
sponding English form. The most exact translation of around or amid is,
alrededor de and en medio de, respectively, there being no possibility of
finding a preposition to fill the gap of the latter, except for the ambiguous
entre.

4.2 ubi - quo relation

A second habitual aspect of languages with developed prepositional sys-
tems is the close relationship between the inventory of ubi, or positional,
prepositions and quo or directional prepositions. For reasons of economy,
in these cases ubi prepositions are frequently transformed into quo prepo-
tions when used with verbs of motion. There are usually few exceptions.
When the nominal casual inflections are conserved, the change in verb type
entails a change in case, dative (stative) / accusative (directional) as in
Latin ((54) or German (55):
Similarly, in English, practically all *ubi* prepositions have a use as a *quo* unit, although the absence of casual inflection leaves the verb as the only reference for determining the sense of the preposition. Dualities such as (56)-(65) are the normal manner of exploiting prepositions on the basis of the nature of the governing verb:

(56) Anyway, there she *was* in her own room / I might *jump* in the lake
(57) She *was into* the pyjamas / *I flew into* Beirut
(58) And what *is inside* the room? / *They walked inside* the inn
(59) The meeting room which *is off* the corridor / He nearly *went off* the road
(60) The television *was on* the drinks table / he *climbed onto* the bike
(61) The Germans *are just over* the river / If you stop here I'll *run over* the road
(62) He *was up the stairs* / he recognized the man who was walking *up* the stairs
(63) I say the car *was down* the road / They *move down* the street like yachts
(64) The two kids *stayed by* the doors / we saw this bird, *walking by* the roadside
(65) The house *is around the corner* / *Run around* the field for an hour, boy

Spanish, however, once again lacks this duality in systematic use. Naturally, we may find the same preposition in *ubi* and *quo* contexts, such as:

(66) *Estuvo* una hora castigado *contra* la pared / *Se lanzó contra* él
(67) *Pasé* mucho tiempo *entre* pescadores / *Se escondió entre* la multitud
(68) *Estaba sobre* la mesa y nadie lo vio / *Caminó sobre* la yerba

But this duplicity is not systematic, and in addition to being closed to many prepositions (*en* has lost its *quo* value\(^\text{17}\); *de* only has *ubi* values in set syntagmata, such as *(estar) de pie, de rodillas* etc.), it has numerous restrictions. Thus, even though *a* exists in *ubi* uses, these are highly limited\(^\text{18}\). The same is true for prepositions such as *ante* or *bajo*, which, even though we can find them with *quo* meaning in examples such as (69)-(70), the use

\(^{17}\) Classical Spanish, and even that of the 18th century, conserved remnants of the directional use of *en*, but more as literary relics than productive forms of the language. As late as 1849 we can read “De hilo me voy en casa de Lucía del Salto” (Fernán Caballero. *La gaviota*: 1849, *apud* CORDE [May 2013]).

\(^{18}\) The use of *a* to express static location is restricted to a few special cases in Spanish, basically: 1) cardinal points or other orientation nouns: *A la derecha/al norte/a 2 Kms.* 2) some specific places: *Sentarse a la mesa; estar al volante*, sometimes with modal rather than local value: *Llevar la escopeta al hombro*, or, finally, with musical instruments: (*≈ en*) *Tocar una sonata al piano.*
thereof cannot be seen in the same light as the dualities of English, German or Latin:

(69)  *Se quedó de pie ante mí / Se presentó ante el director*

(70)  *Estuvo escondido bajo la mesa las cuatro horas / Se escondió bajo la mesa*

Indeed, despite the scant output of resultative constructions in Spanish, these prepositions are always used with a value equated with resultatives. (69) may seem to be a *quo* use of *ante*, but in fact it is the outcome of an action whose result is that somebody is *before* (*está ante*) somebody or something. There are no records in the Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual (CREA) of the preposition *ante* with verbs of movement of the type *vete ante el director* or *se movió ante*, and the same is true of *bajo*. In the case of *por* the alternation is between *ubi* and *qua*, but not *quo*:

(71)  *Eso debe estar por Bretaña / Entró por la ventana*

### 5 Conclusions.

The English prepositional system, compared with the Spanish one, is rich in semantic oppositions and in the systematic use of adverbs and homophonous verb particles, originating from one single unit in different contextual uses. This richness reflects a tendency in Indo-European, and maintained in the Germanic languages, among others, of expressing spatial information through adverbial elements open to grammaticalisation into (nominal) adpositions or verb particles. This tendency went a step further with the creation of prefixes incorporated into the verb, the product of greater grammaticalisation in verb particles. At that juncture there was a fork in the path which would constitute the point of divergence between Germanic and Romance languages and, thus, between Spanish and English.

Latin embarked on the practically wholesale integration of these particles into verbs, transforming them into inseparable prefixes. This information contained in the verb meant that prepositions often became redundant, and spatial expression through them lost ground. This, in turn, meant that the neo-Latin languages inherited an already fragmented prepositional system (a large part of the early prepositions had already become prefixes, and no adverb then had prepositional correlates). This absence of units, in turn, reinforced the role of prefixation as basic for word creation, further weakening the use of analytical elements.
English went through a period of prefixation similar to that of Latin, probably through learned influence, but all the data would seem to show that the popular tendency was that of maintaining and reinforcing particles of an adverbial origin. The maintenance of these units and the ‘slowdown’ of the prefixation mechanism in word formation reinforced the use of adverbs and their numerous possibilities of grammaticalisation - precisely the opposite of what occurred in the Romance languages. English created the verbal particle, outside the sphere of Romance, just as, from the same source, German created the separable particle. The habitual word formation mechanism was thus set through these particles, as opposed to Romance prefixation, establishing the triple inventory (adverbs, prepositions, verbal particles) required to maintain all expressive possibilities.

It may be the case that the path taken by the Romance languages was influenced by the weight of Latin, not only as a starting point for the Romance languages themselves, but also as a style model for the more learned sectors. The same did not occur the Germanic-speaking areas, where Latin was seen as more foreign to their own language, its tendencies clashing with the more analytic ones characteristic of the prevailing Indo-European current.

Consequently, for spatial expression, English uses its rich prepositional system, with the same origin as its verbal and adverbial units, with which they are at times confused. Spanish, however, uses the meaning of its verbs, with more general, contextually interpreted prepositions, resorting to syntactical constructions (adverbial phrases) when it requires specifications not offered by its prepositional system.

References


**Online Data bases**

BYU-BNC = Brigham Young University: British National Corpus. [http://corpus.byu.edu/bnc/], access May 2013

CORDE = Real Academia Española: Corpus diacrónico del español, Database [on-line]. [http://www.rae.es], access May 2013

CREA = Real Academia Española: Corpus de referencia del español actual, Database [on-line]. [http://www.rae.es], access May 2013