In Italiano, as Gaeilge: a Matter of Metaphorical Semantics

Alessio S. Frenda

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In italiano, as Gaeilge:
A MATTER of metaphorical semantics

Alessio S. Frenda
Trinity College Dublin

Abstract

In the present article the linguistic expression of MATTER will be considered with regards to (a) the prepositions involved and (b) the basic spatial meanings (BSMs) of such prepositions. The analysis will concentrate on Italian and Irish. The motivations for the choice of the preposition(s) will be sought after in the theoretical frame provided by Lakoff's metaphorical semantics. In other words, we shall assume that the MATTER sense is a motivated extension of the spatial senses that primarily expressed by those prepositions. According to the above-mentioned framework, a preposition is chosen to express MATTER when there is a metaphorically (i.e., analogically) motivated link between its BSM and the MATTER sense. A sense extension of MATTER (that is, a further sense extension of the BSMs via MATTER) shall be then examined, which – in a way consistent with another widespread metaphor – justifies the employ of MATTER to express linguistic medium.

Abbreviations:

AUT	autonomous	OBJ	object pronoun
BSM	basic spatial meaning	OBL	oblique pronoun
COP	copula	PASSV	passive
DET	determiner	PERF	perfect
Eng.	English	PL	plural
FEM	feminine	POSS	possessive
IMP	imperative	PP	prepositional phrase
INF	infinitive	PPSTPTC	passive past participle
Ir.	Irish	SG	singular
It.	Italian	SUBJ	subject pronoun
lm	landmark	tr	trajector
MSC	masculine	VN	verbal noun

1 Introduction

As has been outlined in Frenda 2005b, in this journal, section 2, "metaphorical semantics" is what Lakoff (1993) calls an approach to linguistics based on the explanatory power of metaphor used as an interpretive tool. Such tool Lakoff had been sharpening and defining in a great deal of studies, culminating with Lakoff (1987) and the illuminating case studies contained therein. In particular, his analysis of the English preposition *over* and its extensive polysemy (ibid.: 416–61) was a model of primary importance for my own comparative analysis of Irish and Italian prepositions and metaphoric sense extensions thereof (Frenda, 2005a).

In the present article a brief presentation will be given of the means employed by Irish and Italian to express the MATTER relations, drawing on the material presented in Frenda (2005a).

2 A characterization of MATTER as a sense extension

The MATTER relation is a linguistically expressed relation between figure and ground (or tr[ajector] and lm [landmark]: cf. Frenda 2005b: section 3 and footnote 2) whereby the latter designates the matter *of* which the former is made. In English, a way of expressing such relation is the preposition *of*, but other ways also exist, e.g. denominal adjectives or nouns used in apposition, as examples (1–3) respectively illustrate:

(1)   This ring is made *of gold*.

(2)   A *golden* watch was found yesterday.

(3)   He grasped the *brass* knob and opened the door.

We will be concerned here with just the first kind of MATTER expressions, those realized by means of a prepositional phrase.

According to the premises of Lakoff's (1993) metaphorical semantics, as has been recalled in Frenda 2005b, section 2, metaphorical mappings are responsible for the sense extensions linking the interrelated meanings of polysemous items. In our case, metaphorical mapping provides a motivation for quite different conceptual relations to be expressed by one and the same preposition, as Lakoff (1993:27) illustrates with the two meanings of *through* (a spatial and a "social" one, respectively) in *I drove through the tunnel* and *I got my job through my uncle*.

It has also been observed (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980:59; Talmy, 2000a:179; Sweetser, 1990:18, 27ff. and passim; Zelinsky-Wibbelt, 1993a:4) that where sense extensions occur by means of metaphor, they normally go from concrete to abstract rather than the other way round, and that space is the most basic and concrete domain, upon which other kinds of less concrete relations may be modelled by means of metaphorical mapping. Lakoff and Johnson (1980:56) claim that simple spatial concepts, like UP, are more likely than others to be grasped directly (i.e. without resorting to metaphorical ways of understanding) because they come from daily, physical experience, and can therefore provide the basis upon which more or less abstract sense extensions can be built, while Levinson (2003:xvii) states that

> [s]patial cognition is at the heart of our thinking. It has long been noted that spatial thinking provides us with analogies and tools for understanding other domains, as shown by the efficacy of diagrams, the pervasive spatial metaphors of everyday language, the evocativeness of place in memory … Spatial cognition probably plays this central role because it seems to be the evo-lutionarily earliest domain of systematic cross-modal cognition: any animal needs to relate what its eyes, ears and limbs tell it about the immediate structure of the world around it.   (Levinson, 2003:xvii)

Therefore, where prepositions have a spatial meaning among other, non-spatial ones, we shall accordingly assume that the latter are related to the former in a way that is motivated by the occurrence of metaphorical sense extensions.

3   *MATTER in Irish and Italian*

3.0   outline

In the next two sections we shall examine how Irish and Italian express the concept of MATTER. In particular, we shall focus on both (a) what BSMs MATTER is a sense extension of in each language and (b) what prepositions are involved in its expressions. In order to do so, each section will have the following structure: first, a few examples will be presented of MATTER expressions (the examples will be sorted out according to the preposition employed). Then, each preposition will be considered in respect of what BSM(s) it corresponds to.

Our examples are drawn from the Irish and Italian corpora of Frenda (2005a: Appendices B and C). The methodology and sources employed for the purposes of their setting up are explained in Frenda (2005a:28–32).

3.1   irish

Irish has two prepositions at its disposal to express MATTER: *de* and *as*, as shown in example (4) and (5) below, respectively:

(4)   A.   *tá*   *sé*   *déanta*   ***de***   *phrás*

                  be   SUBJ:3SG.MSC   make.PPSTPTC   **out of**   brass

                  'it is made of brass'

                  (Christian Brothers, 2004:135)

        B.   *rinneadh*   *gual*   ***dem***   *chroí*

                  make.PAST.AUT   charcoal   **out of.POSS:1SG**   heart

                  'my heart was seared' (lit. 'charcoal was made out of my heart')

                  (Ó Cíosóig, 1997:8)

(5)   A.   *Rud*   *a*   *dhéanamh*   ***as***   *cré*

                  thing   to   make.VN   **out of**   clay

                  'To make something from clay'

                  (Ó Dónaill, 1977: s.v. *as*)

        B.   *abair*   ***as***   *Gaeilge*   *é*

                  say.IMP.2SG   **out of**   Irish   OBJ:3SG.MSC

                  'Say it in Irish'

                  (Christian Brothers, 2004:136)

Whereas both (4) and (5.A) make sense as physical descriptions,[29] (5.B) does not. That is, no physical image is evoked by (5.B) in that no object and no material appear as the tr and lm respectively. Here, the MATTER relation is extended to express LINGUISTIC MEDIUM, according to Reddy's (1979) CONDUIT METAPHOR, which views communication as the process of packing objects (i.e., messages) into apt containers (i.e., linguistic expressions) and sending them to the receiver, who is in charge of unpacking (i.e., decoding) them. It is the CONDUIT METAPHOR, as Reddy argues, that motivates expressions such as *Try to put more meaning into fewer words* and many others, of which he gives an ample repertoire. Since – according to this metaphor – messages are objects, and the same message can assume different realizations if expressed in different languages, then languages can be thought of as the different materials that a message can be made of, so that it might retain the same function, but look (or sound) different. Therefore, LANGUAGE IS THE MATTER MESSAGES ARE MADE OF is a perfectly well motivated rider of the CONDUIT METAPHOR (Frenda, 2005:138).

Both *de* and *as* express the BSM OFF/FROM/OUT OF, that is one that can be characterized – following Talmy's (2000b:55) "Ground's Conformations" and Dirven's (1993:73f.) classification of English preposition – as basically expressing *separation* (also cf. Frenda, 2005a:107–8), as the English glosses and translations also show. A few examples of their spatial usages are given in (6) and (7) below:

(6)   A.   *Tóg*   **den**   *chathaoir*   *é*
                  lift.IMP.2SG   **off.DET**   chair   OBJ:3SG.MSC
                  'Lift it off the chair'
                  (Mac Congáil, 2004:70)

        B.   *ribe*   ***d'***   *fhéasóg*   *an*   *fhir*
                  hair   **from**   beard   DET   man.GEN
                  'a hair from the man's beard'
                  (Mac Congáil, 2004:69)

(7)   A.   ***as***   *a*   *teach*
                  out of   POSS:3SG.FEM   house
                  'out of her house'
                  (Mac Congáil, 2004:67)

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[29] It does not matter, here, that the image described by 4.B has no factual reference to the current state of affairs within which it is uttered, since it is an Irish idiomatic set expression meant to evoke the emotional sphere. Of course, this set expression too is analyzable and explicable in terms of metaphorical semantics.

B. *Tóg*   **as**   *seo*   *é*

take.IMP.2SG   **from**   here   OBJ:3SG.MSC

'Take it away from here'

(Christian Brothers, 2004:136)

As can be seen, *de* seems to focus on the OFF and FROM aspects of the BSM, i.e., respectively, separation as loss of contact (OFF) and origin (FROM); *as*, on the other hand, focuses on the OUT OF and FROM aspects, where OUT OF emphasizes the enclosure-like conformation of the origin (lm).

3.2   italian

Two prepositions are available for the purpose of expressing MATTER relations in Italian too, but two distinct BSMs are involved. The two prepositions, as can be seen in examples (8) and (9), are *di* and *in*:

(8)   A. *un*   *palazzo*   **di**   *metallo*   *con*   *una*   *sfera*

one   building   **of**   metal   with   one   sphere

di   *vetro*

of   glass

'a building made of metal, with a glass sphere'

(Calvino, 1992:381)

B. *rocce*   **di**   *basalto*

rocks   **of**   basalt

'rocks of basalt'

(Calvino, 1992:394)

(9)   A. *rilegature*   **in**   *pergamena*

bindings   **in**   parchment

'parchment bindings'

(Calvino, 1992:394)

B. *[tracciati]*   *segnati*   **in**   *inchiostri*   *di*

[routes]   draw.PPSTPTC.PL   **in**   inks   of

diverso   *colore*

different   colour

'[routes] drawn [on a map] by means of many-coloured inks'

(Calvino, 1992:434)

C. *dimmelo*   **in**   *inglese*

say.INF-OBL:1SG-OBJ:3SG.MSC   **in**   English

'tell me in English'

(*DII*:1921, s.v. *in*)

Before moving on to examine the BSMs of the two Italian prepositions, we would like to point out examples (9.B, C). (9.B) is peculiar in that the preposition *in* (as the English translation would also suggest) is used in a sense that can be considered something in between MATTER proper and MEANS: inks, pencils and such – as opposed, for instance, to brushes – are *used up* as they are employed. Therefore, whereas a brush can be considered as a mere instrument, inks and such are both the means and the matter. In Italian, only the latter kind of MEANS (or MATTER/MEANS) may be expressed by the preposition *in*, as the unacceptability of (9.B′) below shows:

(9)	B′.	*[tracciati]	segnati	**in**	pennelli di	diversa
		[routes]	draw.PPSTPTC.PL	**in**	brushes of	different

grandezza

size

'[routes] drawn [on a map] by means of brush of different sizes'

(Frenda, 2005:60)

A correct alternative would be a PP governed by *con* 'with' (***con** pennelli di diversa grandezza*) (Frenda, 2005:60).

As to (9.C), the same observations hold as we have already stated in 3.1 about example (5.B), i.e., an expression of MATTER is being employed to specify LINGUISTIC MEDIUM according to the CONDUIT METAPHOR (notice that the preposition *in* is also employed in English for the same purpose).

Two very different BSMs are conveyed by *di* and *in*: referring back (Frenda 2005b**,** Figure I), they are OFF/FROM/OUT OF and IN(TO) respectively. We have already been considering the former in 3.1, and it was observed that its BSM is SEPARATION. Deferring for a moment the discussion relative to It. *in*, we shall see a few examples concerning the spatial use of *di*:

(10)	A.	*Andiamo*	**di**	*città*	*in*	*città*
		go.1PL	**from**	town	to	town

'We go from town to town'

(Sensini, 1988:210)

	B.	*Il*	*più*	*bravo*	**della**	*squadra è stato premiato*
		DET	more	good	**from.DET**	team award. PERF.PASSV.3SG

'The best member of the team was given a prize'

(Sensini, 1988:209)

Whereas in (10.A) *di* expresses SEPARATION proper, in (10.B) a very close extension of SEPARATION is expressed, which still falls within the spatial domain and is commonly termed

PARTITIVE. The link between SEPARATION and PARTITIVE was indicated in Frenda (2005a:121f.) in the act of singling/carving out *x* (tr) from *X* (lm), an act that may consist in either a physical separation of the formerly undivided whole (as in *Have a piece of cake!*) or the psychological process of concentrating one's attention on *x* as *separate*, distinct from *X*.[30]

As regards IN(TO), Talmy (2000b:55) and Dirven (1993:73f.) categorize it as a *basic* spatial relation. In Frenda (2005:37), IN(TO) was described as evoking a lm which has certain boundaries within which tr is located (static) or ends up being located after a movement (dynamic) – cf. *Your toys are in the box* vs. *Put your toys in(to) the box*. In other word, the BSM may be dubbed as one of static or dynamic INCLUSION. Examples (11.A, B) will illustrate the static and dynamic aspect respectively:

(11)	A.	*fare*	*il*	*bagno*	***nella***	*vasca*	*di*	*un*	*giardino*
		do.INF	DET	bath	**in.DET**	pool	of	one	garden

'take a bath in a garden pool'
(Calvino, 1992:364)

	B.	*devi*	*entrare*	***nelle***	*scuderie*
		must.2SG	enter.INF	**into**.DET	stables

'you must go into the stables'
(Calvino, 1992:395)

3.3   motivations for the sense extension

Having seen by means of which prepositions the MATTER relation is expressed in Italian and Irish, and which BSMs are associated with such prepositions, we shall now look into the reasons why the BSMs OFF/FROM/OUT OF and IN(TO) associate with MATTER – in other words, what motivates the sense extensions of the two BSMs in question as ways of expressing the MATTER relationship between tr and lm.

3.3.1   A *matter* of separation. The sense extension of SEPARATION to express MATTER is cross-linguistically common: we have seen it in English, Irish and Italian. A discussion of this topic is found in Lakoff and Johnson (1980:72–5), where the metaphor THE OBJECT COMES **OUT OF** THE SUBSTANCE is taken into account together with its mirror-image counterpart THE

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[30] PARTITIVE singles element x_i out of a set X comprised of elements $x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_n$, all interchangeable with x_i and with one another with respect to a common property (i.e., their belonging to X). The PARTITIVE function can also be taken as extracting a portion *x* out of some mass *X*, where the size of the portion taken, as well as the precise region of *X* it is taken from, are not determined by *X*'s properties (cf. *a cup of tea*, *a spoonful of flour*) (Frenda, 2005a:122).

SUBSTANCE GOES **INTO** THE OBJECT (which the authors illustrate with *I made a statue **out of** clay* and *I made the clay you gave me **into** a statue*, respectively):[31]

> We conceptualize changes of this kind – from one state into another, having a new form and function – in terms of the metaphor THE OBJECT COMES OUT OF THE SUBSTANCE. This is why the expression *out of* is used in the above examples: … the statue is viewed as emerging out of the clay. … the substance clay is viewed as the CONTAINER (via the SUBSTANCE IS A CONTAINER metaphor) from which the object – namely, the statue – emerges .(Lakoff and Johnson, 1980:73)

3.3.2   A *matter* of inclusion. Whereas a handy and well-studied motivation was available – as we have just seen – for the SEPARATION → MATTER sense extension, a motivation for the INCLUSION → MATTER sense extension is not easily available. As noted in Frenda (2005:59), a similar English construction is used – as shown in (12) to mark INHERENT PROPERTY:

(12)   This shirt is very nice. Does it come **in** red/**in** a larger size?
              (Frenda, 2005:59)

The PPs *in red/in a larger size* express qualities of the shirt that are inherent to it, that is, qualities that may not be altered. MATTER, too, is an inherent property, and it is possible to find it expressed by an *in*-PP in the same English construction with *come* (13):

(13)   This jacket comes **in** both tweed and wool.
              (Frenda, 2005:59)

Having said that, it remains to be explained what motivates the association between the spatial sense of INCLUSION conveyed by the preposition *in* and the metaphorical sense of MATTER.[32] Further investigations, to consist in cross-linguistic comparison of a cross-linguistically wider range of material, will – we believe – prove of crucial importance to this goal.

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[31] It is important not to take examples such as *make the clay into a statue* for instances of the sense extension IN(TO) → MATTER. The difference between the two conceptual types is evident: whereas in the type *make the clay into a statue* the *in*-PP has the artefact NP as its object (*statue*), in the type we are considering the PP would take as its object the matter NP (*clay*).

[32] It has been observed (Sheerin, 1996:146) that the instrumental sense of the preposition *in* was introduced into Latin (and, hence, into other European languages) as a result of heavy syntactic calques from Hebrew, which came with the first translations of the Bible (also cf. Collins, 1985:50; Palmer, 1954:188). In Biblical Hebrew (Waltke and O'Connor, 1990:196–9), the preposition *b* had the (בּ) spatial meaning of INCLUSION and was also employed to express instruments and "the material with which an act is performed", as in *He overlaid the floor of the temple **with** [בּ =]boards of cypress* (1 Kgs 6:15) (ibid.: 197). Having said that, though, we have only shifted the problem back in time, the reason why Biblical Hebrew associates INCLUSION with MATTER/MEANS being left unexplained.

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4   Conclusions

Drawing upon the analyses carried out in Frenda (2005), we have gone through a brief survey of the prepositional expressions employed by Irish and Italian to express the relation of MATTER ("tr is made *of* lm, a tr *of* lm"), finding that two BSMs, roughly labelled SEPARATION and INCLUSION, were involved. It was observed, too, that whereas the former was common in both the languages, the latter was employed in Italian only. We have also seen that English, employed in the discussion and for the purpose of glossing the linguistic material, sided with Italian in employing both SEPARATION and INCLUSION for the expression of MATTER. To recap, three languages out of three commonly utilize SEPARATION for the purpose under debate, while INCLUSION is used by two out of three.

After giving a few examples of both the extended sense and the basic, spatial one, we set to look into what motivations there were for these two BSMs to develop a sense extension as a means of expressing MATTER. Whereas an explanation was easily found for one sense extension, i.e. SEPARATION → MATTER, which had already been examined by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), we were not able to find any justification for the second sense extension, i.e., INCLUSION → MATTER, and left the problem to further investigation.

However, we took the opportunity to look into a further sense extension of MATTER, i.e. LINGUISTIC MEDIUM, which was alluded to in the title of this article. Our purpose in doing so was to show the recursive nature of metaphorical sense extensions: the use of Ir. *as*, It. *in* to introduce the indication of linguistic code was *not* taken to stem directly from SEPARATION or INCLUSION, i.e., from a BSM, but rather to develop from a sense extension thereof, namely MATTER, via the well-known CONDUIT METAPHOR.

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