

SPATIAL PREPOSITIONS IN SPANISH

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GOALS

- To present a series of syntactic and semantic asymmetries exhibited by “small” Ps such as *bajo* ‘under,’ and “big” Ps such as *debajo* ‘DE.under.’
- To show that these asymmetries can be explained if we postulate that “small” and “big” Ps project different structures.
- To relate the contrast between “small” and “big” Ps to the contrast found with non-clitic doubled structures (1a) vs. their clitic-doubled counterparts (1b).

(1) a. Vi a María. b. La vi a María.
saw.1SG A María CL_{cc} saw.1SG A María
‘I saw María.’ ‘I saw María.’

“SMALL” AND “BIG” PS - EXAMPLES

- (2) a. El libro está **bajo** la mesa. ‘SMALL’ P
the book is under the table.
‘The book is under the table.’
b. El libro está **debajo** de la mesa. ‘BIG’ P
the book is DE.under of the table
‘The book is under the table.’
- (3) a. Juan estaba escondido **tras** la columna. ‘SMALL’ P
Juan was hidden behind the column
‘Juan was hidden behind the column.’
b. Juan estaba escondido **detrás** de la columna. ‘BIG’ P
Juan was hidden DE.behind of the column
‘Juan was hidden behind the column.’
- (4) a. María se paró **ante** la catedral. ‘SMALL’ P
María SE stood front the cathedral
‘María stood in front of the cathedral.’
b. María se paró **delante** de la catedral ‘BIG’ P
María SE stood DE.L.front of the cathedral
‘María stood in front of the cathedral.’

SYNTACTIC ASYMMETRY #1: BARE NOMINALS

A bare nominal is possible as the complement of a “small” P but it is not possible as the complement of a “big” P.

Example:

- (5) a. El pirata escondió el tesoro **bajo** tierra.
the pirate hid the treasure under earth
‘The pirate hid the treasure underground.’
b. *El pirata escondió el tesoro **debajo** de tierra.
the pirate hid the treasure DE.under of earth
‘The pirate hid the treasure underground.’

Explanation:

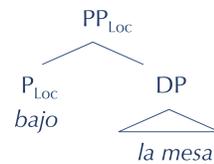
Bare nominals are banned from occupying A-specifier positions in Spanish (Cuervo 2003 and others). The nominal *tierra* ‘earth’ is a **complement** in (5a) but an **A-specifier** in (5b).

Conclusion #1:

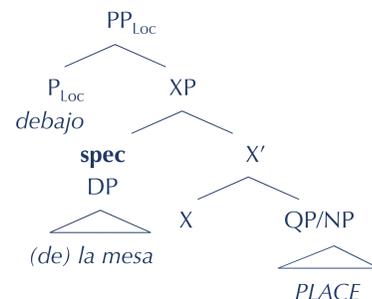
The nominal in the structure of a “small” PP is a complement. The nominal in the structure of a “big” PP is an A-specifier.

THE PROPOSAL

(6) Structure of a “small” P (e.g. *bajo* ‘under’):



(7) Structure of a “big” P (e.g. *debajo* ‘DE.under’):



In (6), the P selects a simple nominal complement.

In (7), the P selects a more complex structure whose specifier is the nominal and whose complement is silent PLACE. The nominal is interpreted as the “possessor” of PLACE (Noonan 2010, Terzi 2010 and others).

SYNTACTIC ASYMMETRY #2: COORDINATION

The complement of a “big” P can be coordinated with another nominal. The complement of “small” P cannot.

Example:

- (8) a. Hay migas **debajo** [de la cama y de la mesa].
have.PRES breadcrumbs DE.under of the bed and of the table
‘There are breadcrumbs under the bed and the table.’
b. *?Hay migas **bajo** [la cama y la mesa].
have.PRES breadcrumbs under the bed and the table
‘There are breadcrumbs under the bed and the table.’

Explanation:

- There is an overt Case-assigner in (8a) (*de*) but a silent one in (8b) (\emptyset).
 - Because Case-assigners cannot be omitted in coordinate structures (Demonte 1991), the structure of (8b) has to be the one in (9).
- (9) bajo [\emptyset_1 la cama [y \emptyset_2 la mesa]
- \emptyset is affixal and needs to incorporate into its host, P_{Loc}, in the syntax
 - In (9), \emptyset_1 (and probably also \emptyset_2) is not in a position from which it can extract and incorporate.

Conclusion #2:

The nominal in the structure of both “small” and “big” Ps is a “Case-assigner Phrase,” or “KP.”

SYNTACTIC ASYMMETRY #3: ADV. INTERVENTION

An adverb cannot intervene between a “small” P and its complement. When adverb intervenes between a “big” P and its complement, it results in mixed judgments.

Example:

- (10) a. *Hay migas **bajo**, probablemente, la cama.
have.PRES breadcrumbs under probably the bed
‘There are probably breadcrumbs under the bed.’
b. %Hay migas **debajo**, probablemente, de la cama.
have.PRES breadcr. DE.under probably of the bed
‘There are probably breadcrumbs under the bed.’

Explanation:

The simpler structure projected by “small” Ps allows for one site of adjunction for the adverbial: an impossible one.

The more complex structure of “big” Ps allows for **two** potential sites of adjunction for the adverbial: a grammatical one, and an ungrammatical one, thus the mixed judgments.

Conclusion #3:

The structure of “small” Ps is simpler than the structure of “big” Ps.

SEMANTIC ASYMMETRY #1: LOCATIVE READINGS

“Small” PPs may have locative and non-locative interpretations. “Big” PPs can only have locative ones.

Examples:

- (11) a. Estos chicos están **bajo** mi responsabilidad.
these kids are under my responsibility
‘These kids are under my responsibility.’
b. *Estos chicos están **debajo** de mi responsabilidad.
these kids are DE.under of my responsibility

Explanation:

Silent PLACE forces a locative reading of PPs. There is a silent PLACE element in the structure of “big” PPs. There isn’t a silent PLACE element in the structure of “small” PPs.

Conclusion #4:

“Big” PPs contain a silent PLACE element. “Small” PPs do not.

SEMANTIC ASYMMETRY #2: BOUNDEDNESS

The nominal complement of a “small” P can be interpreted as bounded or unbounded. The nominal complement of a “big” P is always necessarily interpreted as bounded.

Examples:

- (12) a. Me acosté a descansar **bajo** el sol.
CL.1SG lay to rest.INF under the sun.
‘I lay down to rest in the sun.’
b. #Me acosté a descansar **debajo** del sol
CL.1SG lay to rest.INF DE.under.of.the sun
‘I lay down to rest right underneath the sun.’

[(12b) only felicitous if the speaker is lying under a fake sun]

Explanation:

Possessive structures (such as datives and sentences with the verb *tener* ‘have’) seem to exhibit a ban on unbounded possessors. The nominal complement of a “big” P is a possessor; the nominal complement of a “small” P is not.

Conclusion #5:

The nominal in the complement of a “big” P is a possessor. The nominal in the complement of a “small” P is not.

CLITIC-DOUBLING “EFFECTS”

Uriagereka (2000) observes that accusative clitic-doubled structures differ from their non-doubled counterparts in terms of **referentiality** and **delimitedness**.

Effect 1: Referentiality

- (13) a. Al verte a ti, vi a mi madre en tu sonrisa.
upon see.CL A you saw A my mother in your smile
‘When I saw you, I saw my mother in your smile.’
b. #Al verte a ti, **la** vi a mi madre en tu sonrisa.
upon see.CL A you CL saw A my mother in your smile

In (13a), **without** the clitic *la*, *mi madre* ‘my mother’ is interpreted as an **attribute**. In (13b) **with** the clitic *la*, *mi madre* ‘my mother’ has a referential interpretation (anomalous in the context of (13)).

Effect 2: Delimitedness

- (14) a. Yo toqué esa sonata hasta las 7:00 durante horas!
I played that sonata until the 7:00 during hours
‘I played that sonata until 7:00 for hours!’
b. Yo **la** toqué esa sonata hasta las 7:00 durante horas!
I CL_{cc} played that sonata until the 7:00 during hours

(14a) **without** the clitic *la* means that the speaker played every time a different token performance. (14b) **with** the clitic *la* can only mean that the speaker played an unreasonably long sonata and that this single performance lasted hours, thus the anomaly.

Referentiality and **delimitedness** were precisely the two semantic asymmetries identified for “small” and “big” Ps. The analysis developed so far remains intact, but we make the following final proposal:

FINAL PROPOSAL:

“Big” Ps are the clitic-doubled variants of “small” Ps.

debajo de la mesa is the “doubled variant” of *bajo la mesa*, in the same way that *La vi a María* is the doubled variant of *Vi a María*.

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