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PREPOSITIONS FROM A SEMANTIC POINT OF VIEW

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Abstract: The semantic nature of the word is a core issue constantly addressed in semantics. Prepositions are lexical items that are believed to exhibit more polysemy than monosemy due to the grammatical dependency relations and semantic relations they reflect in different contexts. Opinions on the semantic nature of prepositions have triggered the study of polysemy and monosemy of prepositions as reflected in monolingual dictionaries.

This paper aims to reflect a statistical analysis of polysemic and monosemic prepositions, as well as to discuss on the semantic relations of prepositions. The “Dictionary of the Albanian Language” 2006, has been used to collect and research material and data. Statistically, derived prepositions formed by conversion (composition or affixation) tend to exhibit weaker semantics than the first prepositions, which have a higher density of different semantic meanings. As a result, the semantic structures of the first prepositions show pronounced polysemy. We will argue that prepositions reflected in the explanatory dictionary as a lexical item, where one meaning belongs to the use as an adverb and another meaning belongs to the meaning as a preposition, show doubtful polysemy and can be categorized more as polyfunctional aspects of prepositions. They refer to the basic meaning, which is also responsible for the kind of relationships that prepositions establish in different contexts.

Keywords: *prepositions; polysemy; monosemy; meaning; semantic.*

1. Introduction

Prepositions are lexical units, which have been studied for grammatical and lexical meanings. The lexical meaning of prepositions has been analyzed in many linguistic studies. Lexical representations of prepositions play an important role in examining the meanings that prepositions take depending on the context in which they are used. Their ability to express dependent grammatical relations and semantic relations through the semantic shades that appear in different contexts and the connections they create within the sentence constitute the two main features of prepositions. Their use in multiple structures allows prepositions to express certain meanings, being a source of ambiguity (Çeliku, 2019).

In contemporary language, prepositions are known as lexical-grammatical categories or as grammatical-functional categories. So, the grammatical, lexical,

but also functional category is known to the preposition (Chanturidze, et.al, 2019). They are known for the syntactical grammatical relations and the lexical-semantic relations that they establish during their use in sentences. The lexical meanings of prepositions present changes in time. Some of them acquire new meanings in their semantic structure, becoming ambiguous. The use of prepositions in multiple structures causes their polysemy to appear. This means that the more contextual uses of prepositions we have, the more polysemy appears in this category. But the question that arises is: does contextual use encourage the creation of polysemy or monosemy of prepositions?

Although most researchers support the polysemic nature of prepositions, we will bring several examples of monosemic prepositions reflected in the explanatory dictionary of Albanian “Dictionary of the Albanian Language” 2006. We chose to carry out the collection of material from the explanatory dictionary of Albanian 2006, since this is the last dictionary published so far in Albanian. We aim in this paper to argue that the semantic relations of prepositions are conditioned to their type origin and classification, which also configure the polysemic or monosemic nature of prepositions. The focus of the research review will be related to the evaluation of the phenomena of polysemy and monosemy about the category of the preposition.

2. Literature review

The semantic relations that appear in the parts of speech have become the cause of many controversies in the field of linguistic studies. The same controversies also appear about the semantic point of view of prepositions. Most researchers of traditional linguistics (Grammar, 1995) and contemporary linguistics (Lakoff, 1987; Taylor, 1993; Rice, 1992; Taylor&Evans, 2003; Grochowski, 1994) agree that prepositions appear mostly polysemic, due to their nature to express dependent relationships, connecting with the semantics of the leading and dependent word. Ruhl’s theory (1989) will arbitrarily support the opinion that common prepositions are all monosemic, having a homogeneous (semantic) sense, with all heterogeneity attributable to pragmatic inferences. This means that one basic meaning appears in all contexts of the use of the word. “But all polysemous words correspond to a certain type of unit of meaning let us say a “macro-unit” and it can indeed be argued that all polysemous words are “monosemous” in that sense” (Béjoint, 1988, p. 14). Firth (1934) has also stated that every word when used in a new context is a new word. Every new use of the word corresponds to a new meaning and it is an affirmation of the acceptance of monosemy as normativity. The argument that every meaning is useful puts us in front of the dilemma of whether ambiguity is related only to the meanings of the semantic structure of a word or even to the uses of the word in different contexts and uses.

Observations on the ambiguity of prepositions have been studied from multiple perspectives by various researchers of cognitive linguistics. Taylor (1993) thinks that the context is decisive for the polysemy of prepositions: “Such polysemy at prepositions might be contained in general meanings, of which specific meanings are variants in a context”. Also (Taylor&Evans, 2003, p. 45-59) did not deal in their

studies with lexical units with full meaning such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, or adverbs, but with the semantic analysis of grammatical units such as prepositions, focused on the fact that the polysemy of prepositions appears more in prepositions that show spatial dependence relations (spatial prepositions). They proposed the explanation of the meanings of the semantic structure of prepositions according to the semantic network represented by this unit. The view that prepositions are highly polysemic (high-frequency prepositions in particular) and that they have, as a rule, a larger number of separate meanings than lexical units representing other classes, finds its expression in monolingual lexicography (Grochowski, 1994). Issues on the polysemy of prepositions are also expressed in arguments based on the linguistic experience and intuition of researchers. “As an empirically-minded one, I am committed to justifying each related meaning posited for a single lexical item as well as establishing the nature of the links between them. I contend that, for most lexical items, even for so-called grammatical morphemes like prepositions, polysemy is the norm, but it is also very systematic and more constrained than most monogamists would have us believe” (Rice, 1992, p. 90). Sandra and Rice concluded that prepositions are unlikely to be monosemic and, in particular, that spatial and temporal senses appear to be independently represented in the mind to the extent that homonymy is a possibility (Lindstromberg, S. 2020).

The only researcher who supports the monosemic view of words belongs to Ch. Ruhl (1989), classifies some of them in words far from reality, and they resemble closed classes. Examining the relationship between the abstract and concrete meanings of the meanings of prepositions, he claims that, if the word has a single and fundamental meaning that can fulfill other meanings, then this general meaning refers to the abstract meaning. Starting from the idea of Morris (1971) that he brings about semantics, that it refers to the relationship of signs with objects, and things, then the general meaning is both meaning and referent. Also, Ruhl (1989) considers that pragmatic modulations concretize prepositions, which refer to semantically loaded prepositions, considering monosemy a normativity, while true polysemy is rare. His scientific claim is related to the fact that any given word form has just one intrinsic meaning. The classic question of whether all the meanings of a preposition can and should be reduced to a single one, to then be “embodied” in the context by taking on different shadows, was also addressed by Chauvin (2009).

One of the issues worth discussing is also related to the fact whether polysemy can be accepted in words that do not denote entities or realities such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. And, should we talk about the meanings of a word or the uses of the word (in our case prepositions) in different contexts, through the connections they create within the sentence? Can prepositions have a functional polysemy starting from the usage aspect, or a literal polysemy? Prepositions should be studied not only in terms of literal polysemy (as well as the phenomenon whereby a single word form is associated with two or several related senses) but also in terms of usage, functionality i.e. pragmatic aspects. “Polyfunctionality is intuitively used as a self-evident term, in order to refer to the series of functions realized by a single discourse marker” (Hummel, 2013, p. 65).

Prepositions are included in auxiliary words, which do not have independent lexical meaning. The lexical meaning of prepositions is conditional since they do not express realities such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, or adverbs, which are characterized by separate lexical meanings. However, we cannot deny the fact that some researchers treat prepositions as lexical units, having lexical meaning, which express semantic diversity through the connection they have with the leading word. This means that semantically prepositions are related to the word from which they are grammatically dependent (Çeliku, 2019). Also, Reid (2004) posits one basic or core meaning for each preposition. Nor for those who take a monosemic approach in general, a basic meaning is the synchronically invariant underspecified semantic component of a linguistic form that remains operative in all communicative contexts (Wherrity, 2016). This argument will serve to examine some of the polysemic prepositions in the Albanian language, for the semantic analysis to prove that the prepositions have a basic meaning, while the other meaning variants are nothing but contextual uses of the prepositions.

3. Methods

This paper aims to provide a statistical overview of the semantic structure of prepositions reflected in the explanatory dictionary of Albanian. Until now, studies on statistical data related to the semantics of prepositions have been relatively few. Through this study, we will try to evaluate the importance of the quantitative value of polysemic and monosemic prepositions in the language. We will analyze each preposition presented in the explanatory dictionary of Albanian language, wanting to prove how many of the prepositions are polysemic, to what extent polysemy is presented in the different types of prepositions, and how many of them are monosemic.

To help this study, we used “Dictionary of the Albanian Language” 2006, where we recorded all the reflected prepositions and their illustration. The search of the material was carried out manually, aiming at the accuracy of the precise life calculations. In the dictionary, all prepositions that are monosemic have been identified and further continued with their classification according to the classification they belong to. The illustrations of each preposition through the examples given in the dictionary also served to analyze their semantic structure. The collection of material has been exhaustive and meticulous, working with every letter of the dictionary to highlight prepositions. In this work, prepositional locutions were not considered. We collected quantitative and qualitative data on the number of prepositions in the Albanian language and on the amount of meanings they reflect in the semantic structure, which we used for theoretical interpretation through the method of description, comparison, and analysis.

4. Results and discussions

The prepositions in the Albanian language will be considered for the realization of this study, focusing on their semantic structure. Most prepositions have come from other parts of speech, mainly from adverbs and nouns. Consequently, they can be classified into two main groups: adverbial prepositions and noun prepositions.

When transformed into prepositions, they express certain relationships, depending on the lexical meaning of the elements they connect. The second classification pertains to the division between primary and non-primary prepositions. For the most part, prepositions appear to have a wide range of meanings in the Albanian language (Grammar: 1995). The polysemy of prepositions is also acknowledged in other languages, besides Albanian. Tobin (2008) claims that “prepositions are well-known for their “polysemic” nature” (p. 273).

Researchers have presented different opinions about the semantic status of prepositions. Traditional grammar does not recognize the complete lexical meaning of prepositions, not categorizing them in the same way as nouns, verbs, adjectives, or adverbs, which have full lexical and independent meanings, but as auxiliary words which have conditional meaning and cannot use as independently at sentences (Grammar, 1995). According to Taylor and Evans (2003) prepositions are lexical words that conventionally have meanings, and these pairs of forms are stored in a mental dictionary or lexicon, serving as an interface between syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Since prepositions also represent lexical meanings, even if in some cases it is considered a conditional lexical meaning because they inherit the meaning only from other lexical words from which they are derived, their meanings can be ambiguous or unambiguous depending on their context. The proposition is thus like a prism that requires available light to transmit semantic color. The infinite polysemic account, on the other hand, may attribute a specific meaning to each usage (Rice, 1992). The monosemic approach to prepositions is related to all meanings, which can and should be summarized in a single pragmatic aspect, which is then “embodied” in the context and takes on different shades (Chauvin, 2009).

The “Dictionary of the Albanian Language” 2006 was used for the collection and research of the material. The examination of the material shows that in the Albanian dictionary (2006), nearly 100 prepositions are listed, with most of them having multiple meanings. It seems that unambiguous prepositions are relatively few, leading us to believe that monosemy is a rare phenomenon within the group of prepositions included in the dictionary. Some of the monosemic prepositions include *thanks (verbal preposition), until, top, over, over*, etc. Prepositions that are polysemic have between two and ten meanings per lexical unit, such as *for, in, from, around, with, after, out, horn, up, over, after, above*, etc. The rich semantic structure of these prepositions shows that they have semantic diversity, which is obtained through their conditioning by the context, i.e., depending on the syntactic structure in which they appear. Çeliku (2019) states that “derived prepositions generally express individual and limited lexical meanings” (p. 37). This suggests that they are more likely to be oriented towards monosemy compared to the first prepositions in the Albanian language, which display a rich semantic structure. According to traditional linguistics (Grammar, 1995), most prepositions are not first but have emerged from other parts of speech, primarily from adverbs and nouns. The first prepositions in the Albanian language show a wide range of meanings. Based on this statement, we should expect prepositions to be characterized by unambiguity rather than polysemy in their semantic structure,

given that a larger number of prepositions are derived. If we refer to the statistical data collected from the albanian language dictionary, we note that we have:

Table. 1 *Statistical analysis of prepositions in the Albanian dictionary*

Prepositions	Monosemyc	Polysemyc
Primary prepositions	1 preposition	18 prepositions
Related prepositions	4 prepositions	84 prepositions
Adverbial prepositions	2 prepositions	77 prepositions
Nominative preposition	1 preposition	7 prepositions
Verbal preposition	1 preposition	

In the Albanian language, they are known as first prepositions: *in, with, without, for, on, under, among, on, from, to, from, to/to, until/until, since, since, as far as, though, as well as* (in albanian language: *në, me, pa, për, mbi, nën, ndër, më, prej, ndaj, nga, te/tek, deri/gjer, pos, qysh, sa, se, si*) and their origin is still unclear in today's Albanian (Çeliku, 2019). All these prepositions are polysemic and have a rich semantic structure. Ambiguity is characteristic of first prepositions because their earliest existence in the language has caused them to have a more intensive use in the language. As a result, their semantic structure has been enriched, due to their use in different situations. "In Rice's (1992) analysis of English prepositions, she argued that the different uses clustered around several very different senses" (Klein and Murphy, 2002, p. 551).

The focus of this paper is the derived prepositions, such as: *on all sides, all over, towards, inside, on the side, sideways, along, outside, on this side of, against, besides, away, up, back, between, aside, between, over, around, through, behind, besides, around, over, etc.* (in albanian language: *anëmbanë, anekënd, drejt, brenda, anës, anash, gjatë, jashtë, këtej, karshi, krahas, larg, lart, mbrapa, mespërmes, mënjatë, ndërmjet, përmbi, përçark, përmes, prapa, përveç, rrotull, sipër*). In the dictionary of Albanian language, we find presented about 84 derived prepositions, which are formed by conversion (e.g. *beside, by, right, thanks, away, up, at the top, before, back, round, around, about, across, etc.*), (in albanian language: *bri, buzë, drejt, falë, larg, lart, majë, para, pas, qark, rreth, rrotull, mes*) and with composition/attachment (*on all sides, all over, after, according to, between, among, inside, in the end, outside, above, in front of, around, below, etc.*), (in albanian language: *anëmbanë, anekënd, mbas, sipas, mespërmes, ndërmjet, përbrenda, përfund, përjashta, përsipër, përpara, përreth, tëposhtë etj*). These prepositions are reflected in the dictionary as lexical units with two or more meanings, where one meaning belongs to the use as an adverb and the other meaning as a preposition. "The classical approach to the meaning of prepositions presented in dictionaries, where, for a preposition there is usually a long list containing its meanings and describing their use in different contexts, without making any attempt to find any connection between these meanings", has been accepted and by Negrievska (2019, p. 47). Since this group is thought to be later in the Albanian language, their weak semantic nature is also understood, which

stems from the more limited use of these prepositions in different contexts and semantic structures (the different connections that are created through phrases). Consequently, they appear in no more than ambiguous semantic structures, given that their few uses have not turned into a source of polysemy. The question worth discussing in this paper is related to whether these prepositions are polysemic or polyfunctional. Since their meanings correspond to uses in certain contexts, should we consider the polysemy or multifunctionality of prepositions? Let's consider some prepositions as reflected in the explanatory dictionary:

- **around (përreth)** *adv.* around and around, around: *looked around*. · *preposition (the ablative case – abl.)* around: *around the fire*.
- **back (mbrapa)** *adv.* behind. · *preposition (abl.)* back.
- **outside (përjashta)** *adv.* outside: *go out, look outside*; · *preposition (abl.)* outside of, *outside the yard*.
- **in front of (përkarshi)** *adv.* in front of, opposite: he sat in front of. · *preposition (abl.)* in front of, versus, against me.
- **opposite (përkundrejt)** *adv.* opposite; face to face: I had it opposite. · *preposition (abl.)* in front of, facing from...: *in front of my house*.
- **through (përmes)** *adv.* passing through something: it fell to the village through. · *preposition (abl)* together with a noun indicates the place, environment, phenomenon, event, etc. in the middle of which is passed: *through the field; through winter, etc.*
- **round (përqark)** *adv.* around: *it fell around*. · *preposition (abl.)* around, around: *around the house*.

Suppose we still refer to the claim of Cruse (1986, p. 16) that “the meaning of a word is fully reflected in its contextual relations”. In that case, it means that the contextual uses of prepositions, which appear once as adverbs or once as prepositions, can be categorized more as polyfunctional aspects of prepositions, than as polysemic. The functional aspect of prepositions has also been addressed by Rice (1992), who classified them according to their pragmatic and summary functions. Even if we were to consider prepositions, which have a rich semantic structure with several meanings, then we would notice that derived meanings are nothing but contexts, interpretations, or functional uses derived from the main meaning. Researchers have assumed that there is a single primary sense associated with a preposition and that the other senses are derived from this primary sense in principle (Tyler and Evans, 2001). If the meanings of a preposition are almost the same but are constructed as such in the explanatory dictionary to be reflected as different voices, then doubt arises about the polysemic nature of these prepositions. In the given examples, we are dealing with a basic (basic) meaning, which is used in some contexts and this is nothing more than Wherrity's (2016) idea of monosemy “lexical items should be understood as having one basic meaning which applies in all contexts - monosemy” (p. 202). Even in the following examples, where we have considered prepositions with a rich semantic structure in their uses as adverbs and prepositions, we notice that the meanings of the lexical units on their own are almost the same, for example:

- **before (para)** *adv.* forward: walk forward; *I got money.* · *preposition (abl.)* 1. spirit, thing, etc. in front of which there is someone or something: *in front of the house*; the person in whose presence someone acts: the situation or phenomenon in front of which someone is: *appeared before the court*; the time on the eve of which something is preceded: *before a week*. 2. the spirit, the thing, etc., with which the comparison is made: *it was not worth it before him*.
- **through (nëpërmes)** *adv.* from one side of a country to another; beyond *passed through.* · *preposition (abl.)* 1. together with a noun or a pronoun marks the environment or thing, in the middle of which someone or something passes: *through the field*. 2. through: *through detailed description*.
- **next (ngjat)** *adv.* quite next to something else, near *it lives here like.* · *preposition (abl.)* 1. right next to: *sit like your friends*. 2. compared to...: *you are small like him*.
- **aside (mënjanë)** *adv.* 1. apart from others, separate: *stay aside*; 2. on the side: *with a pillow aside.* · *preposition (abl.)* apart from someone or something: *apart from friends*; near, on the side: *beside the village*.
- **beyond (përtej)** *adv.* 1. across, there: *went beyond*. 2. more than a given quantity: *100 kg and beyond.* · *preposition (abl.)* 1. across: *across the river*. 2. the measure or quantity that is exceeded: *beyond the estimated amount*.

All the meaning variants of prepositions, which are reflected sometimes as adverbs and sometimes as prepositions, come from a basic meaning. To clarify the notion of “basic meaning”, we are referring to the definition of Wherry (2016), which states that “basic meanings the synchronically invariant underspecified semantic component of a linguistic form which remains operative in all communicative contexts” (p. 209). We think that in these cases if we are not dealing with monosemy, we should at least consider their homonymy. But in the dictionary of the Albanian language, these words are not even presented as homonyms. “Rejecting the homonymic approach leads to the conclusion that there must be something in the conventional meaning associated with the lexical item that leads the speaker to choose that lexical form over another” (Negrievska, 2019, p. 48).

Derived prepositions that are formed by attachment are included in adverbial prepositions, while their morphological structure is also analyzed according to the category of adverbs. If prepositions are treated in grammar as separate words, then their meanings that express different relationships (space, time, etc.) constitute the basic meaning, that is, they are the bases of their meaning. Prepositions are used with different meanings depending on the context, and the semantics of the underlying meaning are also responsible for the type of relationships they create in use. “If we refer to the argument that the meaning of a word in a certain context is equal to the inherent meaning of the word” (De Chicchis, 1992, p. 170), then we can accept that the cases when prepositions are reflected in the

dictionary explanatory as polysemic when they are within a lexical item (meaning as adverb and preposition) increase the possibility of treating them as monosemic. Monosemy (Ruhl, 1989), posits that all interpretations of a linguistic form, such as a preposition, are contextually derivable from a highly abstract primary sense. The discussion on the evaluation of the degree of polysemy of prepositions, compared to other words as lexical units, put us in front of the need to argue that polysemy is related not only to the meanings of the semantic structure of a word, but also to the uses of the word in different contexts and uses.

5. Conclusions

In this paper, we attempted to treat the category of prepositions from a semantic perspective, evaluating the nature of meaning of prepositions with polysemy and monosemy. Prepositions in the Albanian language turn out to have in most cases a multi-meaning structure. First prepositions, which have a rich semantic structure, exhibit the most polysemy, while derived prepositions generally express individual and limited lexical meanings, having a weaker semantic structure. Monosemic prepositions are relatively few. According to the classification of prepositions into adverbs, nouns, and verbs, adverbial prepositions have a more pronounced degree of polysemy.

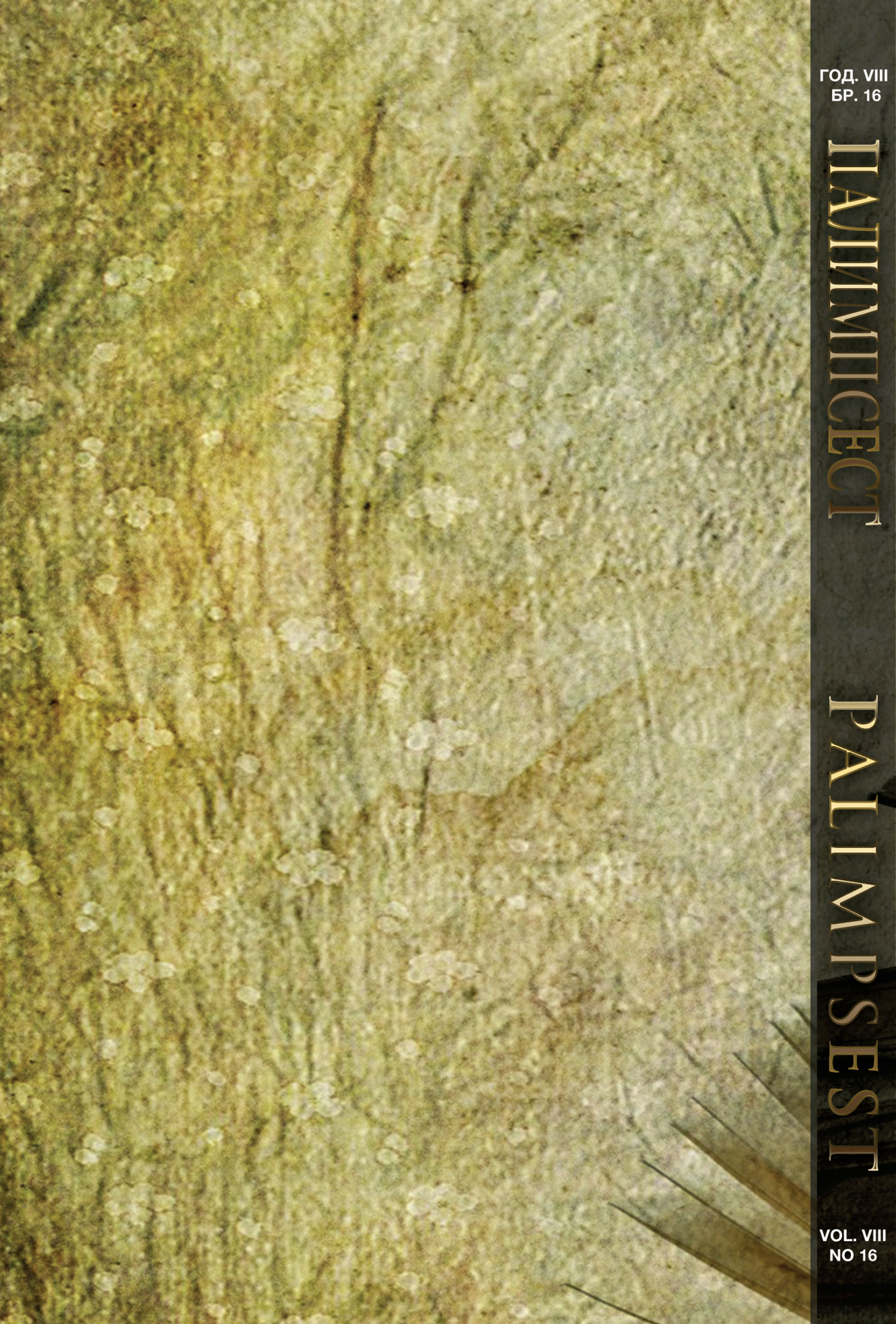
The primary focus of this study was on derived prepositions. Numerically, they constitute the majority of prepositions in the Albanian language. Their semantic structures appear ambiguous and polysemic. Since the derived prepositions emerged later in the language, their use in the language might not have been as intensive as that of the first prepositions. In the explanatory dictionary of the Albanian language, they are represented as a lexical item, where one meaning pertains to their use as an adverb, and the other meaning pertains to their use as a preposition. Based on the contextual uses of prepositions, which appear once as adverbs and once as prepositions, we believe that they can be more appropriately considered or treated as polyfunctional aspects of prepositions rather than as polysemic. Additionally, the morphological structure of adverbial prepositions is analyzed concerning the adverb category, suggesting that this group of prepositions exhibits a questionable degree of polysemy in their semantic structure.

In conclusion, we believe that prepositions are characterized by their polyfunctionality as a language category. The contextual uses of prepositions in different situations, where they are used both as adverbs and as prepositions, can be classified more as polyfunctional aspects of prepositions than as polysemic. The issues addressed for semantic structure of prepositions, come at the moment when the large explanatory dictionary of the Albanian language is being drawn up and can contribute to the way prepositions are reflected in the explanatory dictionary.

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