

The Semantics Of (*fii*) In Taizzi Dialect: A Cultural Variation Perspective

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Abstract

In this paper, we adopt the framework of Cognitive Grammar developed by Langacker (1987) to provide a unified account of the different senses of the Arabic preposition (*fii*) as used in the Taizzi dialect, one of the dialects spoken in Yemen. The use of (*fii*) in the Taizzi dialect differs from its use in other dialects of Arabic or even Standard Arabic. That is, (*fii*) is cognitively characterized differently in the Taizzi dialect from (*fii*) in other Arabic dialects or (*fii*) in Standard Arabic. It remains a fact that despite the number of studies that dealt with prepositions, in general; prepositions received little attention and semantic analyses of prepositions remain inadequate (Cienki, 1989; Hamdi, 2002; Lunt, 1982). With regard to prepositions of Arabic, the main problem with the previous studies that dealt with them, in general, is that they examined them from a grammatical point of view focusing on their functions rather than their meanings. Moreover, these studies dealt with prepositions as used in Standard Arabic and were basically established upon the views of old Arab grammarians. The data presented and analyzed in this paper show that speakers of the Taizzi dialect developed the use of (*fii*) and extended its semantics to cover cognitive domains different from its use in Standard Arabic or other dialects of Arabic. However, what proves to be true about the use of (*fii*) in the Taizzi dialect need not necessarily be so about other dialects of Arabic. This reflects the cultural variance of prepositional usage in the Taizzi dialect in particular and other dialects of Arabic in general. The paper demonstrates that though speakers of the Taizzi dialect use (*fii*) in cognitive domains different from its use in Standard Arabic they still cognitively characterize the relation holding between the Trajector (TR) and the Landmark (LM) as a containment relation.

Keywords: cultural variance, Cognitive Grammar, prepositional semantics, Arabic language, Taizzi dialect.

Introduction

The category of prepositions constitutes a form of speech in almost every language or even a dialect, spoken or written. Except for few languages like Korean prepositions are the means with which speakers of a language encode spatial relations (Lindstromberg, 2010). Regarding Arabic, prepositions with the number of at least seventeen prepositions, Al-Afghaani (1971), constitute a crucial category of the language. Nevertheless, for the most part of literature written on Arabic prepositions or even its different dialects the analyses and investigation on prepositions were based, largely, on a descriptive ground.

The importance of prepositions results from the necessity of lexicalizing spatial relations in our everyday life and the fact that it is mostly through prepositions these spatial scenes are depicted. Furthermore, different languages vary in the ways they utilize prepositions to encode spatial relations. Fuse (2006) maintains that languages contrast in the various ways they lexicalize spatial relations depending on the details of the relation itself, and the grammatical forms of the spatial terms themselves.

Moreover, prepositions cover a wide range of relations where they can profile different kinds of relations, “simplex or complex”, (Langacker, 2008). This makes the category of prepositions uniquely different from other linguistic categories that can profile either simplex or complex relations.

On the other hand, the cognitive approach of analysis has proved to be one of the most dynamic approaches by which a language is analyzed. Dirven and Ibanez (2010) maintain that the dynamicity of Cognitive Linguistics is due to the fact that it arises from the combination of various pioneering ideas that, acting as separable strands of one whole, have drawn together to give rise to a unified paradigm. According to Ibanez what is peculiar about Cognitive Linguistics is that it is not a simple descriptive method of analysis; rather it is a multi-based scheme of analysis that deals with both cognition and language.

Prepositions and Cognitive Grammar (CG)

Human beings are orientated in space and prepositions are the means that speakers use to lexicalize different spatial relations. This extensive use of prepositions will presumably lead to a kind of semantic flexibility and lexical variations regarding the preposition used to encode a spatial relation. It is believed that cognitive analysis of a lexical item, prepositions are no exception; helps in establishing a clear formulation that explains to utmost level possible its semantic range, (Hamdi, 2002; Lee, 1999).

The fact that users of a language, spoken or written, are incorporated in space leads to the realization of the inevitable use of prepositions as to encode the spatial relations they are surrounded by Chafe (1985), in the same vein, claims that prepositions are one of the

operative devices that written languages use to expand the size and complexity of idea units.

It is a truism that in some cases speakers of the same language, though different dialects, differ in the ways they lexicalize ‘*the same*’ spatial relation. For example, two speakers of Arabic where the first is a speaker of the Taizzi dialect¹ (henceforth the TD) and the other is a speaker of Libyan Arabic will use different lexical items to ask someone else whether he/she has got money or not. The speaker of the TD will use the lexical item طرف /*Tarafa*/ meaning ‘beside’ whereas the Libyan speaker will use the lexical item تحت /*taHta*/ meaning ‘under’. Look at the examples below:

1. (a) طرفك بيبس

Tarafa-k biyas? (Yemeni Arabic)
beside-you money
Do you have money with you?

(b) تحتك فلوس

taHta-k fuluus? (Libyan Arabic)
under-you money
Do you have money with you?

The variant ways speakers of one language choose to express a spatial relation is because of the relatively variant manners these speakers cognitively construe this relation. While speakers of the TD look at money as a ‘companion’ of the possessor, Libyan speakers look at it as something that is ‘under’ the full control of the possessor. Another explanation we got from our Libyan informants is that elderly Libyans used to ‘conceal’ their money within the folding of their cloths. They use the word تحت /*taHta*/ meaning ‘under’ to describe the state of the concealed money. In most of the cases, people conceal something by putting it ‘under’ something else.

Despite the views of some linguists who considered prepositions to be meaningless words (Tesnière 1953), and some Arab grammarians who judged prepositions to be less important and less meaningful than the arguments they relate; prepositions show an extremely significant role in expressing a wide range of relations. Prepositions show, largely, capability of describing a wide set of metaphors and abstract expressions that can be subject to linguistic analysis.

The studies that semantically dealt with the prepositions of one of the Yemeni dialects are totally absent. However, there are a number of studies that morphologically or

¹ Taiz is a city situated in the south west of the republic of Yemen. It is the capital of Taiz Governorate and is the third largest city in Yemen. Taizzi dialect, on the other hand, is the dialect spoken by the people of Taiz and is considered one of the variants of Arabic language. In terms of number of speakers and being a dialect of around three million people, the TD obtains its position as one of the most important dialect in the Republic of Yemen.

syntactically dealt with Yemeni Arabic like Qafisheh (1984). On the other hand, other studies dealt with Yemeni Arabic from a sociolinguistics point of view. The study of Al-Zumor's (2009), for instance, touched upon the specific linguistic act of 'Naming'. The study is basically concerned with investigating personal names, particularly female names in one of the Yemeni dialects in particular.

In the following section, we will incorporate some of the notions of CG to probe into some of the peculiar variance of the prepositional usage of (*fii*) as used in the TD.

At the basic semantic level, the Arabic preposition (*fii*) belongs to the semantic field of 'containment'. Nevertheless, (*fii*) is able to cover a wide range of spatial relations that together form a coherent semantic network where the concept of CONTAINMENT is the underlying image schema.

The Study and Data Analysis

In this section, we employ the framework of CG to examine the use of (*fii*) in accordance with the TD speakers' everyday perception and interaction with the outside world. The speakers' interaction with outside world and cultural background results in the possibility of using a preposition to depict various spatial relations. This has to do with the different mental images that the speakers have of how to situate these entities around them.

It is a dictum that languages contrast in the various ways they lexicalize spatial relations depending on the details of the relation, (Fuse 2006). Lindstromberg (2010) maintains that our total experience of a word determines what this word means to us. This experience and knowledge background of the meaning of the word strongly influences our uses of it. He observes that since no two people have ever had precisely the same experiences, we are all bound to understand and use many words differently.

Different senses of (*fii*)

The conundrums of (*fii*) lie in being very tempting to be used in the locative sense. Other difficulties with (*fii*) are with regard to its multiplicity of meanings. Further, (*fii*) translates to five possible English prepositions, which reflects its richness and its capability to cover a wide range of multiple senses.

The paper will present a set of related senses of the polysemous preposition (*fii*) as exhibited in the TD that is not found in the Standard Arabic. As a polysemous preposition (*fii*) can signify a variety of peculiar senses that are associated with TD like 'existence', 'vertical and horizontal containment', 'measure and percentage', and other domains and abstract metaphorical senses.

These seemingly unrelated multiple senses as one can assume are related to each other and can be analyzed in terms of family resemblance and under the semantic field of 'containment'. The instances and the explanation below show how speakers of a language or even a dialect build a rapport between their understanding of the lexical item and their conceptualization of the real world.

1. (fii) - The horizontal and vertical axes

Though the sense of containment suggests that the TR² should be contained within the boundaries of the LM; the TR in the instance below is in horizontal or vertical position in relation to the LM. That is, horizontality and verticality play an important role in better understanding the sense of containment as the use of (fii) in the TD shows.

The use of (fii) in the instances below implies that the LM contains the TR, albeit the LM is situated horizontally above or under the TR, or vertically the TR is situated at the beginning, end, or even the middle of the LM. The TR can even be situated opposite to the LM and the LM contains only the reflection of the TR. Consider the following instances:

(2) واقف في الظل

waaqef fii aD-Dell
standing (he) in the shade
He is standing in the shade.

(3) واقف في الشمس

waaqef fii aŠ-Šams
standing (he) in the sun
He is standing under the sun.

(4) واقف في الطابور

waaqef fii aT-Taabuur
standing (he) in the queue
He is standing in the queue.

(5) شفت نفسي في المراية

Šuftu nafsii fii al- miraayah
saw (I) myself in the mirror
I saw myself in the mirror.

In instance (2) the LM is technically situated under the TR. If one is standing on something he/she has to be situated above it, and this entity plays the role of a supporter.

Since the sense of support is not strongly implied, the use of the preposition *على / Salaal* meaning 'on' does not seem to be a competitive candidate to encode this relation. The relation between the TR 'he' and the LM 'shade' is mentally perceived as such 'shade' is an enclosure of 'he' and thus prevents the sunlight to reach 'he'. The sense of containment in this instance overmasters the sense of support and that justifies the use of (fii).

² The notions of Trajector (TR) and Landmark (LM) are used to name the participants in a spatial relation. In a containment spatial relation, for instance, TR stands for the contained entity and LM stands for the entity that serves as a container.

We find a similar situation in (3) where the TR ‘he’ is vertically situated down the LM ‘sun’. In such a case the use of the adverbials فوق */fawq/* meaning ‘up’ or تحت */taHt/* meaning ‘down’ seems to be very tempting to be used to encode the spatial relation between the TR and the LM.

‘Sun’ is perceived as an entity that has extensions that contain the TR. If one is standing under the sun, he/she has to be exposed to sunlight, surrounded and contained by it. From a mental perspective, the ‘sun’ here is conceptualized as an entity that plays the role of container. The sense of containment is perceived as the focal relation between the TR and the LM and that justifies the use of the preposition (*fii*). What reinforces our argument here is that some speakers of the TD might choose the adverbial بين */bein/* meaning ‘in between’ or وسط */waST/* meaning ‘in the middle of’ to encode this relation.

The use of (*fii*) in (4) implies that the TR is contained in the inner part of the LM. The LM ‘queue’ is more likely to contain the TR ‘he’ in its interior. That will quite understandable in contexts where the TR is located in between the two ends of a queue. The question is that will the speakers of the TD use (*fii*) to encode that relation if the TR is located at the beginning or the end of the queue? The answer is ‘yes’. Taking the horizontal axis into account, we can simply understand that if one is the first in a queue, no one would be there to precede him/her, and if one is last in a queue, no one would be there to follow him/her. In other words, containment in both cases remains ‘partial’. The TR, in both cases, is thought of as being contained from one side and the other end remains open. The figure below shows the location of the TR and the LM in the spatial relation given in (4):

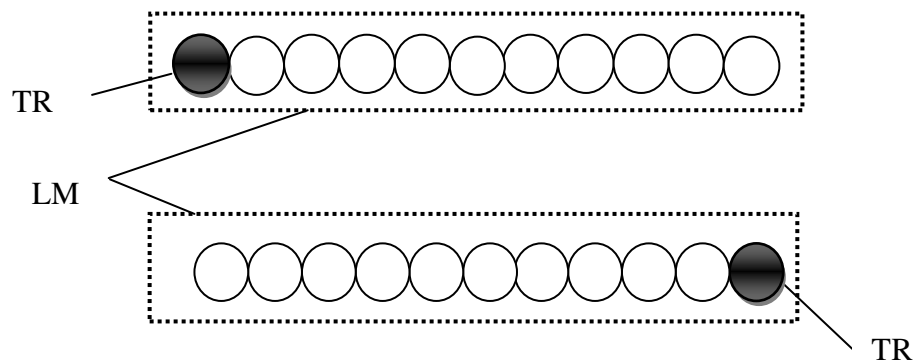


Figure 1: He is in the queue.

The TR in (4) constitutes a dispensable portion of the LM. The TR ‘he’ is a part of the LM ‘queue’, albeit ‘he’ profiles the TR in this instance. The TR can even stand for the LM itself. We can imagine a situation where ‘he’ is standing alone waiting for his turn, and there comes another one trying to trespass him, he would ask him/her to stand in the ‘queue’.

The LM ‘mirror’ in (5) contains only the reflection of the TR ‘myself’. Here, what draws the speaker’s attention is the reflection of the TR rather than the TR itself. The speaker characterizes the ‘mirror’ as a container and focuses more on what it contains, and the actual location of the TR comes in second priority. This justifies the use of (*fii*), since the

sense of containment is perceived within the frames of the LM. On the other hand, instance (5) does not clearly how much of the TR is reflected and contained in the LM. It seems that the sense of containment itself carries more significance than any other details, and the speaker, as a result, chooses to exploit (*fii*) to encode this relation.

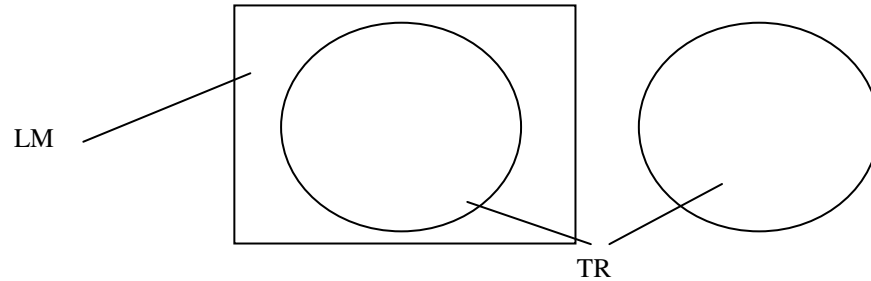


Figure 2: 'I saw myself in the mirror'

Compared to instance (5), there are situations where (*fii*) is used to encode a relation of a TR that is directed towards a LM. In such a situation, the TR is neither actually contained by the LM, nor situated upon or below it. Using (*fii*) in such instances implies that the speaker, way or the other, conceptualizes the TR as being contained by the LM. Consider the following instance:

(6) كل واحد عينه في ورقته

kol waaHed ŧeenoh fii waraqtoH
every one eye his in paper (his)
Everyone keep his eyes in his answer sheet.

In (6), the speaker conceptualizes the TR 'eye' as entity that has a focus point that, in turn, is situated in the LM. Though the TR in the instance above is never thought of as being factually contained in the LM, the speaker seems to be more concerned with the visual focus and the location where it is situated. The LM in (6) is perceived as to contain the extension of the TR, and consequently the TR has to be directed towards the LM. Consider Figure 3:

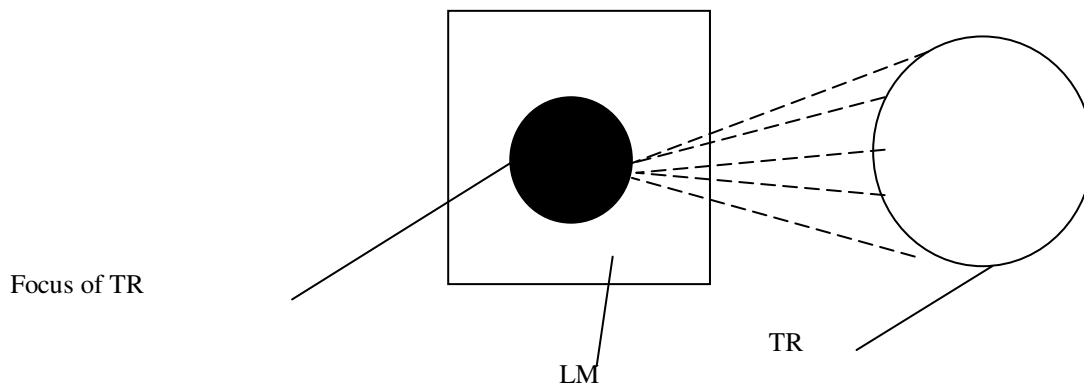


Figure 3: 'Everyone keep your eye in your answer sheet'

Figure 3 shows that the TR is situated outside the interior of the LM, and only the focus point that is contained within its boundaries. The dashed lines, on the other hand, suggest that the TR is directed towards the focus point represented by the black circle.

2. (fii) - The domain of measure and percentage

In the instances below, the TR is mentally conceived as contained within a LM that denotes measures. The relation between the TR and the LM in these instances is perceived as such the TR is enclosed within the dimensions that at the same time profile the LM. The logic behind using (fii) to encode such a relation is that the LM is conceived as a frame with limited measures within which the TR is contained. Consider the following sentences:

(7) اشتي صورتين أربعة في ستة (7)

a. aštii Suurah ʔarbaʕah fii sittah
want (I) a photo four in six
I want a passport-size photo.

b. مقاس الغرفة ثلاثة في أربعة

maqaas al-Gurfah ʕalaaʕah fii ʔarbaʕah
measure the room three in four
The size of the room is three in four.

In (7a) and (7b) the TRs 'photo' and 'room' are contained within the measures 'four' and 'six' and 'three' and 'four' respectively. Going through the instances above we will undoubtedly notice that the figure that precedes (fii) outnumbers the figure that follows. It seems that the speakers of the TD are very much aware of the sense of containment in a further profound way and as a result they choose to order the figures in such a way that the bigger number contains the smaller one. Thus, the numbers 'four' and 'three' come first, and then the numbers 'six' and 'four' follow (fii).

The same is true regarding the multiplication table. The speakers of the TD use the preposition (fii) to linguistically express the mathematical sign 'x'. In the expression /xamsah fii sittah/ that roughly translates as 'five multiplied by six' the LM, being bigger than the TR is likely to contain it. However, what if the speaker chooses to put it the other way around? As a matter of fact the speaker will still use the preposition to encode this relation. The speaker is aware of the fact that the resulting number of the multiplication process is eventually equal or bigger than the numbers that are multiplied. Hence, the resulting number can serve as a container and that justifies the use of the preposition (fii). We can understand that the multiples of zero are the exception of this rule.

In the same vein, (fii) can be used in the domain of percentage. This is a very much similar situation where (fii) implies containment. Here the use of (fii) helps us understand the relation as such one number profiles the TR and the other profiles the LM and the TR is enclosed by the LM.

What is to be noted here is that though the relation is perceived as such the TR is enclosed by the LM, the TR represent a proportion of the LM. That is to say, the TR signifies a proportion in relation to a whole; the whole here is represented by the LM.

The containment relation in such cases is profiled by two numbers and the whole contains the proportion. As we can simply observe, in some particular instances the proportion can suit the full space of the whole. The TR and the LM can have the same ratio, in such cases. Consider the following instance:

(8) ميه في الميه

miyah fii al-miyah

a hundred in the hundred

One hundred over one hundred.

In instance (8) the relation of containment is defined by use of (*fii*). The TR and the LM are profiled by the same number- 'one hundred'. The proportion and the whole, in this instance, do have the same ratio and the proportion suits the entire space of the whole. In figure 4, the bold line marks the outline of the LM and the shadowed area represents the TR. As is obvious, the contained TR fills the entire interior of the LM.

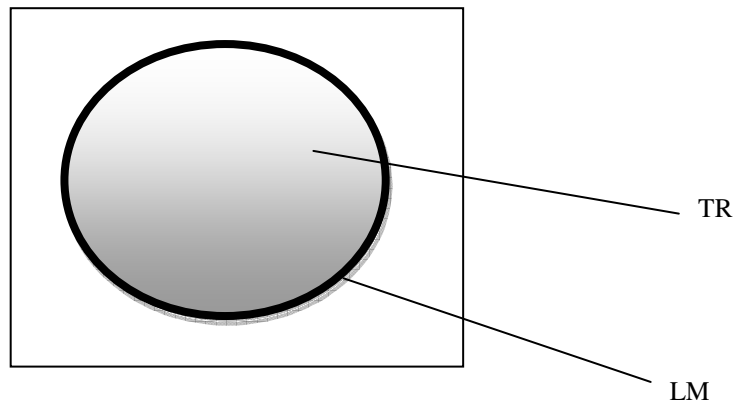


Figure 4: The TR and the LM having the same ratio

In some cases, the TR fills the entire interior of the LM and even gets out of the outline of the LM. In such instance, the number that profiles the TR outnumber the number that profiles that LM. The idea of containment is still maintained in these instances though it implies another sense. When the speakers choose to raise the ratio of TR as to outnumber the ratio of the LM they convey the idea of certainty along with the idea of containment. In such instances, the TR is profiled by multiples of a hundred, a thousand or a million. Consider the following instance:

(9) بيسافر مليون في الميه

baysaafer malyuun fii al-miyah

will travel (he) a million in a hundred

He will travel for sure.

In instance (9), the use of (*fii*) implies that the TR ‘million’ is contained in the LM ‘hundred’. Although, we might not accept the possibility of containing a ‘million’ by a ‘hundred’; the introduction of the idea of ‘certainty’ helps them have a clear image of the situation. The TR is thought of as to cover the entire space of the LM and exceed it as not to leave any room for doubts. See Figure 5 in which the TR LM and exceeds the boundaries of the LM:

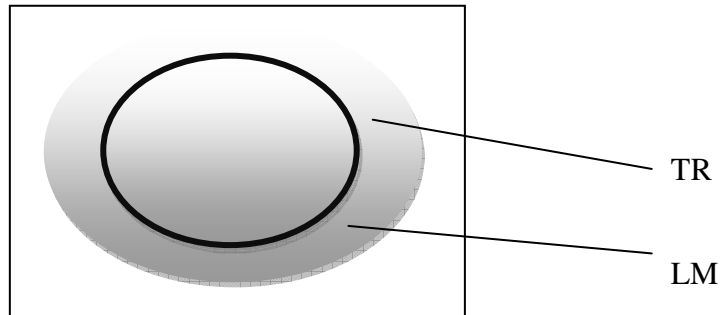


Figure 5: TR exceeds the outline of the LM

3. (*fii*) - The domain of existence

Arabic prepositions, in general and (*fii*) in particular, are not meant to express existence. However, one of the meanings of (*fii*) as used in the TD is to express existence. This is a very distinct usage of (*fii*) in the TD. The TD in this resembles other languages like Slavic languages that express existence with prepositions. Reindl (1994) notes that the Slavic languages exploit prepositions to express movement into, existence in, and movement from spheres of location. The speakers of the TD mentally relate this sense of (*fii*) to the sense of containment in that if some entity has to exist it has to exist in a space where it is contained realistically or symbolically. Consider the following instances:

(10) من في؟

man fii

who in

Who is in?

(11) في درجات كويسة

fii daragaat kuwwiyyisah

in marks good

There are good marks.

(12) في معاك حليب؟

fii maʕaak Haliib

in with you milk

Do you have milk?

In the instances above, the use of (*fii*) implies that the speakers of the TD conceptualize the TR as to be situated within the interior of the LM. This kind of understanding is very much fundamental to the meaning of these instances.

In instance (10), the TR and the LM are not linguistically represented. In other words, there are no entities mentioned in this instance to profile the TR and the LM. If this is the case, the reasonable question to ask is that how to justify the use of (*fii*). As is mentioned above the speakers of the TD mentally relate the sense of existence to the sense of containment, an existing entity has to be located somewhere in space where it is contained. Since the speaker here enquires about the entity that exists, the TR is supposed to be profiled in the answer the enquirer is likely to get. The case of the LM here is slightly different. The inquirer in this instance asks about a TR that is contained in a well-known place where it is contained. Being well known to both parties, the enquirer finds it not necessary to name the LM.

We find a much similar situation in (11) and (12) with one difference that the TRs are profiled in both instances. Naming the TRs in the instances above indicates that the idea of already-based knowledge of the TRs is not emphasized. The speaker is mentally aware of the fact that he needs to name the TR to have a proper communication with the other party. The LMs remain not referred to since they are mentally realized by the speakers and the hearers of these instances, however.

Though the combination of two prepositions is considered ungrammatical in Standard Arabic, speakers of the TD find no problem with that especially when a semantic necessity calls for it. Apparently, if (*fii*) is semantically overloaded, the speakers of the TD prefer to distribute the semantic load and bring in another preposition to contribute to the semantic message beside the preposition (*fii*). The closest candidate to share (*fii*) that semantic load is the preposition */bil/*. Consider the following instance:

(13) فييه ملح ؟
fii boh melH
exists in it salt
Is there salt in it?

In the instance above, two prepositions are combined, namely (*fii*) and */bil/*. Though (*fii*) can semantically carry the meanings of ‘existence’ and ‘containment’; speakers of the TD assign (*fii*) to express the meaning of ‘existence’ and nominate */bil/* to express the sense of ‘containment’.

It is worth mentioning here that choosing (*fii*) to express the sense of ‘existence’ and leave the sense of “containment” to the preposition */bil/* to express is not arbitrary at all. The sense of ‘existence’ lies out of the range of the semantics of the preposition */bil/*. In this light, speakers of the TD seem to be very much aware of this fact and they make use of their knowledge to help the listener clearly understand the utterance and correctly perceive the intended meaning.

Discussion

The use of (*fii*) in different cognitive domains as presented above strongly supports the hypothesis that the choice of (*fii*) is based on cognitive and cultural considerations. That is, each preposition of Arabic has a meaning and based on that it is chosen to encode a spatial relation holding between two entities. The instances presented above show how cognition and the way a speaker characterizes a spatial relation control the choice of prepositions to encode a relation being physical or metaphorical. The presentation of data in this paper shows that some uses of (*fii*) are exclusively found in the TD and probably some other dialects of Yemen.

Using (*fii*) to encode a spatial relation where the TR is contained within the LM is generalized to its use in standard Arabic and the TD. However, its use in other cognitive domains is specified to the dialectal use of (*fii*) rather than its use in the standard variant of Arabic. In addition, this can be generalized to cover many dialects of Arabic language other than the TD.

Exploiting a preposition to encode a spatial relation, speakers of the TD are influenced by two factors. The first is the nature of spatial relation holding between the TR and the LM. The second is how the speaker characterizes this relation. The cognitive semantic analysis of (*fii*) in the TD shows that its use to encode a spatial relation where the TRs are not actually contained within the interior of the LMs is motivated by the image schema of containment. It is this sense of containment that serves as the core meaning to which the use (*fii*) in the cognitive domains presented above can be related.

The data presented above show that speakers of the TD extend the use of (*fii*) to depict spatial relations other than the ones where the TR is actually contained within the boundaries of the LM. In such cases, (*fii*) encodes spatial relations in which the TRs are out of the boundaries of the LMs, the TRs and the LM are horizontally or vertically related to each other, and where the TRs are supposed to exist within the boundaries of the LMs.

In all these cases, however, the use of (*fii*) to encode these spatial relations proves that speakers of the TD cognitively characterized the LMs as containers that contain the TRs.

Conclusion

This paper has contributed to the research of prepositional semantics in a couple of ways. First, it has allowed us to explore some of the peculiar uses of (*fii*) as used in the TD. The paper has demonstrated that TD experienced a great variance in the different domains it can cover, some of which are not covered in the use of (*fii*) in Standard Arabic.

Secondly, being based on contextualized instances, this paper presents a more applicable sort of analysis. Furthermore, the notions of CG have helped us to analyze the data more effectively and to link these different uses to the general schema of containment.

However, it has to be kept in mind that it would be difficult to generalize all the sense of (*fii*) discussed above to all dialects of Arabic language.

It is envisaged that such a study can be repeated on other dialects or even on other prepositions on the TD involving different data and more notions of CG. This can also be expanded to explore the variant senses of a lexical item of other categories within the TD or other dialects of Arabic language. It appeared that the benefits which we gained from adopting the cognitive approach in analyzing the semantics of (*fii*) in the TD significantly contributed to the literature of dialectal studies of Arabic and cognitive research. This can be further expanded to cognitively examine the prepositional usage of (*fii*) in other dialects of Arabic, other prepositions in the TD, or other prepositions in various dialects of Arabic.

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