

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Applications and Conclusions**

#### **1. Introduction**

This investigation of a rarely discussed NP form has shown that the category of bare singulars is heterogenous, comprising some NPs capable of being used as definite referring expressions, others used in inferences in which the location sense is only background information, and finally, NPs used as kind-referring generics. In tracking the behavior of the locative expressions containing these NPs, I have relied on an analysis of a corpus of naturally occurring data, rather than on predictions and classifications based solely on intuition.

Touching as it does on both prepositions and NPs, both predicates and referring expressions, as well as patterns of word meaning extension, I expect this work to prove useful on several counts. The dissertation details a new range of syntactic constructions that are matched to certain pragmatic functions, expanding our repertoire of functional syntax. In particular, this examination of bare forms occurring in locative PPs

will help in separating traditional adverbial PP uses from those in which the NP object has more specific referential qualities. Through such an understanding of the phrases containing these NPs, I open an avenue of investigation to researchers of similar morphosyntactic markers in other languages. In addition, tracing the constraints on the set of nouns used as bare singular nominals sheds new light on discussions of the mass/count distinction and the nominal level at which this distinction applies, as well as on the way we categorize location referents. This issue of categorization is one which I see as especially fruitful in future investigations of the social and cognitive influences on our categorization of places, as well as in expansions of the existing work on the translation of prepositions, which currently reveals so much about our categorization of space. Finally, this dissertation should further our understanding of determiner distribution in English, which has immediate applications in the teaching of English as a second language.

## **2. Discourse Tagging and Translation**

Identifying the Activity, Familiarity, Generic, and contrast or Specified Co-Hyponym uses of these PPs makes available techniques that assist in referent identification within a given discourse. Bare nouns can now be indicated as either instances of a definite NP (the deictic/possessive

Familiarity interpretation), as categories named in Generic reference, similar to that evoked by bare plural forms which encompass all instances of the named location, or as part of non-locative PPs used to indicate the activity occurring at the location.

Unlike conversational pragmatics, which looks at how a sentence may mean something different each time it is uttered, discourse pragmatics examines how the “relationship between a given sentence form and the function of the sentence in discourse is directly determined by grammatical convention” (Lambrecht 1994:5). The discovery of presuppositions attached to the bare singular form as well as the set of nouns that might appear in bare form should have applications in both tagging and translation of text corpora.

An examination of these PPs and their different discourse functions, expressed in English via the same bare singular form is relevant in a monolingual English text corpus that aims to replicate the speaker’s and hearer’s cues about the changing discourse model. Bare form uses represent the kinds of concepts that need to be considered in parsing and tagging English as an on-going reflection of the discourse. For example, we can better describe PPs which contain spatial prepositions as having

a broader, but not unpredictable range of case types than those involving thematic roles, e.g., locative (*in the park*), manner adverbials (*with a glance, on foot*), or tool adverbials (*with a hammer*). A more useful set of concepts to encode would include identification of discourse function tags such as topic, hearer-known referent, new referent, reference to a kind, deictically anchored referent, etc. Uses of the bare singulars bring us closer to a working set of such taggable discourse concepts.

The initial split in discourse functions found in a data base culled from English is reinforced by subcategories expressing the same contrasts in other languages. While not all languages use the lack of articles to show this, examples such as Korean's locative vs. object morphemes or the choice in French of two synonymous prepositions (e.g., *dans* and *en*) indicate the varied ways languages show contrasting functions for PPs containing location words. Once semantic/discourse contrasts are made clear, the existence of a range of overt markers in other languages (which map onto a single English marker—the bare singular form) reinforces our need for a better vocabulary for elaborating the functions of PPs. Thus, in translation, too, it should be possible to indicate a more accurate match between differences that do not appear to show up in the English morphosyntax, but that are active in its seman-

tics/pragmatics.

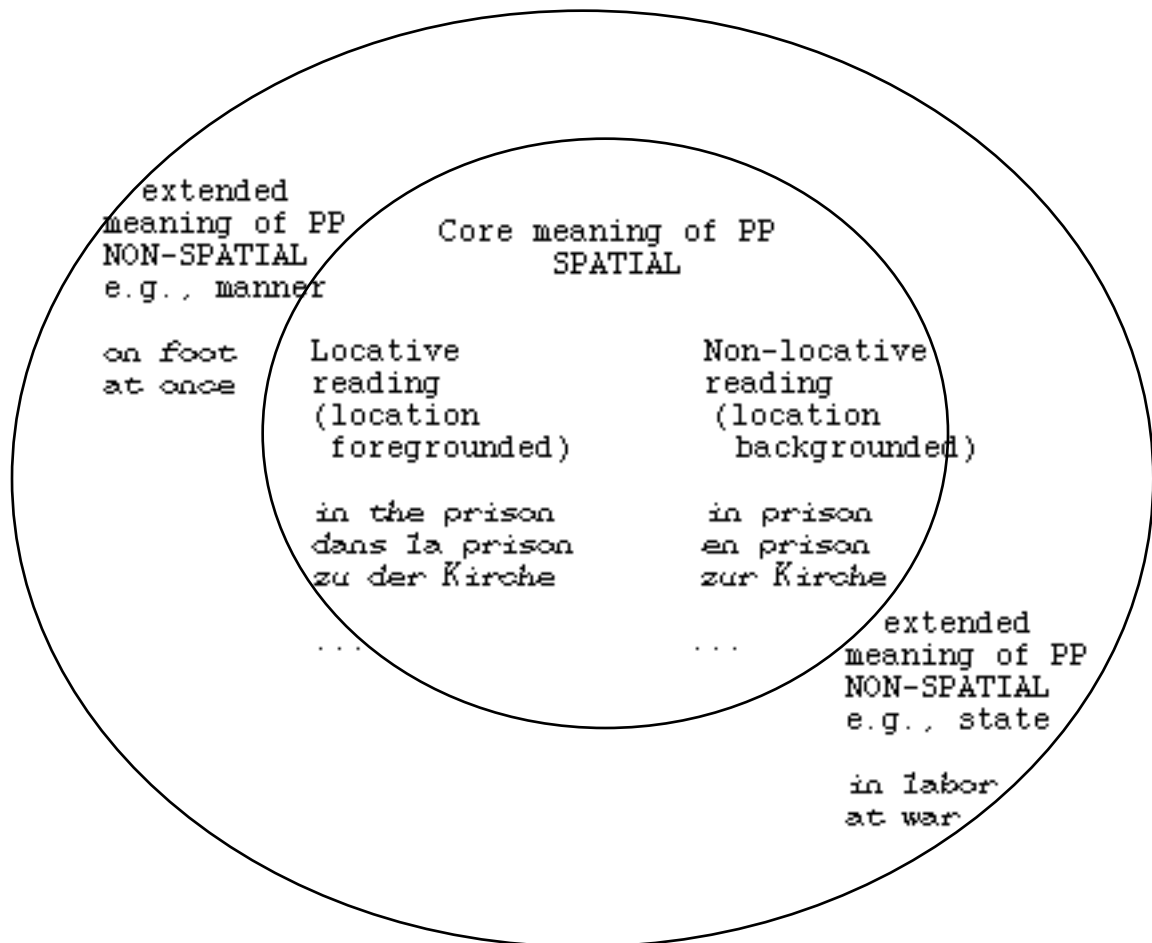
### **3. ESL Applications**

Native speaker competence relies on more than knowledge of allowable syntactic structures, but crucially requires a mapping of a given language's forms to the ways these can be used to represent concepts. One immediate application of the work in this dissertation which should be considered is language teaching. While input may be insufficient for a second language learner to learn about the full range of bare singular NP functions in English, mastery of their discourse functions can be facilitated by enhanced input in the classroom. To gain competence in English, the discourse functions of the article system must be mastered, which not only includes separating definite from indefinite uses, but also information about when a noun appears with no article—and the inferences this licenses.

### **4. Conclusion to Chapter 6**

When nouns appear in spatial PPs, we have seen that some bare singular NPs are interpreted in a non-locative way, contrasting with articulated forms. As seen in Figure 4, both these sets of spatial PPs contrast as well with other PPs formed from extensions of the preposition beyond

the spatial domain, creating PPs such as manner or state adverbials (e.g., *by hand, on foot, in labor, in person, at war*).



**Fig. 4. Spatial and Non-Spatial Uses of Locative PPs**

The forms discussed in this dissertation differ from non-spatial PP expressions in the following ways: the marked uses (activity and specified senses) rely on a backgrounded location sense contributed by the

spatial sense of the prepositions. In such a case, non-locative information is what is foregrounded or stated.<sup>1</sup> With PPs having manner or state senses, however, no statement of location is made at all because in those cases the prepositions are not conveying spatial information, but instead supply a background sense via some other extended, non-core meaning. Both the marked (bare singular) and unmarked (articulated) locative PPs rely on the more central, spatial sense of the prepositions.<sup>2</sup>

Greenberg (1978a:254-257) notes a tendency for languages to use no article with NPs that are “taken in a generic sense,” including adverbial and locative uses, but also with those taken as inherently determined, such as proper nouns and vocatives. While most treatments of bare singulars observe their presence in locative PPs and treat them as examples of generic NPs, as we saw, this categorization underdetermines the uses of bare forms for English. While bare forms are generic and non-locating, Familiarity uses of Social and Geographical Spaces, as well as Framing expressions for media terms, do indicate specific places, thus acting more like the inherently determined NPs. A bare singular NP’s

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1. For further discussion of viewing the referent of a grammatical unit as foregrounded/asserted or not in different contexts, see Chafe (1972, 1976).

2. For discussion of the core sense and extended senses for prepositions, see work on metaphorical word extensions in Lakoff (1987).

surface form does not provide sufficient information to determine its meaning. Although the sets of nouns involved are semantically described and the NP forms are syntactically identified, the types of uses to which speakers put bare singular NPs are pragmatically defined, relying on both convention and grounding in a given discourse.