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A Syntactic-Semantic Study of Spatial Prepositions in the 30th Part of The Glorious Quran with Reference to English

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Abstract

Current study presents a syntactic-semantic survey of spatial prepositions in English and Arabic concentrating on employment of this type of prepositions in the 30th part of Glorious Quran. Researcher started the study with investigating syntactic and semantic aspects of spatial prepositions in both English and Arabic, making a comparison between the two languages to know to what extent they are similar or different concerning spatial prepositions. Then, researcher analyzed occurrences of spatial prepositions in verses of the 30th part of Glorious Quran to achieve purpose of the study. Comparison between English and Arabic's spatial prepositions revealed that such prepositions in Arabic tends to be more simple and specific in number and meaning than in English which involves a large number of prepositions used in a diversity of meaning.

On the hand, analysis of Arabic spatial prepositions used in these suggested Glorious Quran verses displayed that such prepositions showed uneven occurrences; as well as occurrence of certain prepositions implying meanings different from their essential ones.

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تحليل نحوي- دلالي لحروف الجر المكانية في الجزء الثلاثين من القرآن الكريم بالاشارة الى اللغة الانكليزية

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المستخلص

الدراسة الحالية تقدم عرضا نحويا دلاليا لحروف الجر المكانية في اللغتين الانكليزية والعربية مع التركيز على توظيف هذا النوع من حروف الجر في الجزء الثلاثين من القرآن الكريم. تبدأ الدراسة باستقصاء الجوانب النحوية والدلالية لحروف الجر المكانية في كل من اللغتين ثم تجرى مقارنة بينهما للوصول الى اوجه التشابه والاختلاف فيما يتعلق بموضوع البحث. بعد ذلك تقوم الباحثة بتحليل ورود هذه الحروف وتوظيفها الدلالي في آيات الجزء الثلاثين من القرآن الكريم لتحقيق الغرض من الدراسة. وقد اظهرت المقارنة بين حروف الجر المكانية الانكليزية والعربية ان هذا النوع من حروف الجر في اللغة العربية يميل الى ان يكون أكثر بساطة وأكثر تحديدا في حيث العدد والمعنى من نظيره في اللغة الانكليزية الذي يتضمن عددا كبيرا من الحروف التي تستخدم بمعان مختلفة ومتنوعة.

من جهة اخرى، فقد تبين من تحليل استخدام حروف الجر المكانية في آيات القرآن الكريم المقترحة ان ظهور هذه الحروف كان متفاوتا (في العدد)، الى جانب ظهور حروف معينة منها متضمنة معان تختلف عن معانيها الاساسية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: حروف الجر، حروف الجر المكانية، التحليل النحوي، التحليل الدلالي.

1. Introduction:

Prepositions represent a very important area in any language, and mastering their usage is - to a certain extent - difficult. Their importance lays in the significant function they have within sentences - they typically identify relationship between words in a sentence. On the other hand, how to use prepositions correctly is sometimes difficult especially for learners of any language. In English, for example, and as Quirk et al (1985) claims, there is a number of prepositions that indicate a diversity of relationships between words. Such a problematic matter may represent a real challenge for EFL (English as a foreign language) learners who are usually affected by their native language when trying to use English prepositions.

For this importance of prepositions, however, it would be necessary to know what a preposition is. Many grammarians suggest rather similar definitions of prepositions concentrating on their functions in a context. Quirk et al (1973: p.143) say that a preposition “expresses a relation between two entities” having different types of “relational meaning” such as time, place, instrument, and cause. Leech et al (1982: p.52) claim that “prepositions introduce prepositional phrases, and express relations of possession, place, time, etc.” Similarly, Biber et al (1999: p.74) and (2002: p.28) define prepositions as “linking words that introduce prepositional phrases”.

As it is mentioned in these definitions, prepositions have a linking function expressing a variety of relations and meanings. In this study focus will be given to prepositions with spatial meaning in both English and Arabic and to their employment in verses of the Glorious Quran.

2. Aims of Study:

This study aims at:

- 1- Investigating spatial prepositions in English and Arabic both syntactically and semantically, and making a comparison between English and Arabic to find out aspects of similarity and difference concerning spatial prepositions.
- 2- Shedding light on use of spatial prepositions in verses of the 30th part of Glorious Quran.

3. Hypotheses:

This study is built upon the following hypotheses:

- 1- There are some similarities and differences between English and Arabic regarding spatial prepositions.
- 2- Spatial prepositions have a semantic effect on understanding Quranic contexts (the 30th part as a model).

4. Methodology:

Following procedures are adopted as the methodology of study:

- 1- Discussing English prepositions, concentrating on spatial prepositions.
- 2- Discussing Arabic prepositions, concentrating on spatial prepositions.
- 3- Conducting a comparison between English and Arabic spatial prepositions.
- 4- Analyzing semantic functions of spatial prepositions in the 30th part of the Glorious Quran.
- 5- Viewing conclusions.

5. English Prepositions:

5.1 Syntactic functions of prepositions:

A preposition with its complement typically constitute a prepositional phrase which has several syntactic functions. Quirk et al. (1973: p.145) suggest the following functions of prepositional phrases:

- 1- post-modifier of a noun:

A prepositional phrase can be used as a post-modifier in a noun phrase

The men in the street were quarrelling.

- 2- adverbial:

Prepositional phrases can be found in a function of adverbials, used as adjuncts, disjuncts, and conjuncts.

The men were quarrelling in the street. (adjunct)

With all pride, she went up the stage and started to speak. (disjunct)

On the contrary, they were kind and helpful. (conjunct)

- 3- complementation:

A prepositional phrase can be found as a complementation of either a verb or an adjective

She was happily looking at the photos. (verb complementation)

He is fond of classic music. (adjective complementation)

5.2 Semantic functions of prepositions:

Semantically speaking, prepositions are used to show relation between objects. Fion (2005) mentions that a preposition is used to express spatial relation between “a figure and the landmark”, to identify relation between entities in “temporal aspect”, or to show reason, manner, circumstance, etc. Quirk et al (1985:673,695) suggests various types of relations expressed by prepositions, such as space, time, instrument, cause, reason, purpose, manner, etc.

5.3 Spatial Relation of Prepositions:

Spatial relation can be defined in terms of showing location of an object to another. Evans and Tyler (2003) explains spatial relation through a scene that “involve two entities associated in a particular spatio-configurational way”. Quirk et al (1985:673-87), however, categorizes prepositions indicating spatial relation into various types, and this categorization will be followed as a model for discussing spatial prepositions in this section of study.

1. Spatial prepositions denoting dimension: Prepositions like at, in, and on can be used to denote dimension. However, three types of dimension are represented by the use of these prepositions

a- zero dimension, in which a preposition is used to show dimensionless location, i.e., to refer to position of an object or a person

He is at his office.

b- line or surface dimension, in which preposition indicates a two-dimensional relation, i.e., it refers to lines and surfaces

There is a nice restaurant on that road.

There are some cups on the table.

c- area or volume dimension, in which a three-dimensional relation is indicated as the preposition refers to an enclosed space

There are only a few chairs in this room.

2. Spatial prepositions denoting destination:

Prepositions (to, into, and onto) are typically used to indicate positive destination, while (away from, off, and out of) are used for negative destination. Meaning of destination is particularly associated with dynamic verbs like (go, fall, jump, etc). The following examples illustrate positive destination

They went to the market.

He jumped into pool.

He fell onto the floor.

In some cases(in and on)can be used for destination

She put the flowers in the vase.

He fell on the floor.

On the other hand, negative destination is illustrated by these examples

People were running away from the fire.

The plate fell off the table.

He went out of the room.

3. Spatial prepositions denoting relative position and relative destination:

Some prepositions express relative position of objects, either vertically or horizontally. Typically,(above, over, on top of, under, underneath, beneath, and below) are used for vertical relation; while (after, before, behind, and in front of) are used for horizontal relation.

There is a bridge over the lake. (vertical relation)

The lake is under the bridge. (vertical relation)

The truck is in front of the car. (horizontal relation)

The car is behind the truck. (horizontal relation)

On the other hand, these prepositions (except above and below) can also express relative destination

She threw the papers over him.

The cat went under the chair.

4. Spatial prepositions denoting space:

Such prepositions are divided into three groups:

a- those describing locative relation,(beside, by, close to, near(to), opposite, and with)

He stood by/beside the window.

She sat near(to)/close to me.

His shop is opposite(to) our house.

b- those referring to positional relation of an object to “discrete” or “nondiscrete” objects,(between, among, amongst, amid, and amidst.)

However,(between) is typically used to refer to relation between two definite objects, whereas others refer to indefinite objects.

He was sitting between his two friends.

The house stands among/amid the farms.

c- those referring to “surrounding position”, (about, around and round)

We sat (a)round the table.

There are few shops about here. (=in this area)

5. Spatial prepositions denoting passage:

Sense of passage is expressed by such movement prepositions as(across, past, and through)which are attached to volumes and enclosed spaces or moving beyond certain point.

The horse ran across the grass.

The insects came in through this hole.

He walked past her house.

6. Spatial prepositions denoting directional path:

Meaning of directional path can be referred to by (up, down, along, across, (a)round, towards, to, into, and over.)

(Up and down) are mainly understood in terms of vertical direction

He climbed up the ladder.

We went down the hill.

But they can also express same meaning of (along) with no reference to a vertical direction

He ran up and down the platform.

Along and across, on the contrary, express direction horizontally

I walked along the beach.

I saw her going across the street.

As for (a)round, its directional path suggests curved destination

They walked around their house.

On the other hand, motion indicated by towards is either ‘real’ or ‘implied’

He drove towards his old village.

I like this house, it faces towards the sunrise.

Implied motion is also indicated by using (to, into, and over)

We took a taxi to college.

She whispered into my ear.

He looked at me over his glasses.

7. Spatial prepositions denoting orientation:

Prepositions(beyond, over, across, past, through, up, down, towards and (a)round;)) that refer to destination, passage and directional path can be used to express orientation in a static sense, referring to location or position of objects rather than their movement

The beach is beyond the hill.

The house lies through/across the wood.

The supermarket is just past the bus station.

My room is up the stairs.

There are trees around the house.

6. Arabic Prepositions:

In Arabic, prepositions are defined as particles preceding noun phrases and submitting them to genitive case. Morphologically, they are divided into two groups; inseparable and separable. Inseparable prepositions are represented by certain prefixes attached to their complements, they include (الواو)، (اللام)، (التاء)، (الكاف)، (الباء). Separable prepositions, on the other hand, are specific functional words that precede their complements. (Aziz, 1989:pp.187-8).

6.1 Syntactic functions of prepositions:

Syntactically, prepositions function as particles inserted to noun phrases changing them into genitive case (which is one of parsing cases of nouns in Arabic beside subjective and objective cases). However, Al-Ansari (1985: p.442) and Ar-Rajihi (w.d. : p.98) state following syntactic functions of Arabic prepositions:

1- Setting noun in genitive case; which is the basic syntactic function of prepositions, for example

الكتاب على المنضدة. (the book is on the table)

Noun (المنضدة) is in genitive case because it is preceded by preposition (على) .

2- Combining sentence parts together; a preposition works as a conjunction combining its object with other parts of sentence

وضعت الحقيبة على الارض. (I put the bag on the floor)

The preposition in this sentence combines its object , verb and object of sentence.

6.2 Semantic functions of prepositions:

Use of prepositions supplies context with different meaning. Hassan (2006: p.126) and As-Samerra'i (2007:p.155) claim that prepositions in Arabic are categorized according to some semantic functions, summed up as follows:

1-place (spatial) function, which denotes position or destination of someone/something. For example

الاولاد في الحديقة = (position)

(the children are in the garden)

ذهبت الى السوق = (destination)

(I went to the market)

2- time function, which indicates 'when' an action occurs, as in

حضر الضيوف في المساء

(the guests came in the evening)

3-causative function, which shows cause or reason such as in

عوقب لأهماله

(he was punished for his carelessness)

4- possessive function, denoting possession as in

الحمد لله

(Praise Be to Allah)

5- instrumental function, as in

سافرت بالطائرة

(I travelled by plane)

6- accompaniment function, as in

جاء الرجل مع ابنه

(the man came with his son)

As for this current study , it concentrates on spatial prepositions, the following section is a thorough discussion of spatial function of Arabic prepositions.

6.3 Spatial relation of prepositions:

The following prepositions mainly have a spatial function. Each of which will be discussed separately, with concentration on their spatial meanings.

1- (في fi)

It denotes following meanings

a- position: when used with static verbs, it expresses a locative sense of position, that something or someone is located in/inside or at a specific place

(The book is in the bag) الكتاب في الحقيبة

(I was at the market) كنت في السوق

b- destination and passage: with movement verbs, this preposition gives a meaning of destination (that something/someone moves into a place)

(The boy fell into the water) سقط الولد في الماء

or passage (moving across or through a place)

(They walked across the field) ساروا في الحقل

2- على ('ala)

It occurs with static and movement verbs, expressing

a- position on surfaces, with existence of a direct contact between object and surface

(The cups are on the table) الاكواب على المائدة

b- destination (movement onto a surface)

(I threw the ball onto the floor) رميت الكرة على الارض

3- الى (ila)

It is typically used with movement verbs, referring to destination

(We travelled to Baghdad) سافرنا الى بغداد

4- من (min)

a- destination: same function as previous preposition, but it denotes negative sense of destination

(He came from Baghdad) جاء من بغداد

b- origin, in this sense it is used with static verbs

(I am from Iraq) انا من العراق

5- (bi) "الباء"

This is an inseparable preposition attached as a prefix to its complement. It expresses

a- location, with static verbs

(I stood at the door) وقفت بالباب

b- destination, with movement verbs

(I passed through the village) مررت بالقرية

It is worthy to mention that words like

in front of = امام , behind = وراء/خلف , between = بين , around = حول

beside = جانب through = خلال across = عبر next to = قرب

are considered nouns not prepositions, and they function as adverbials.

7. Comparison between English and Arabic Spatial Prepositions:

This section presents a comparison between English and Arabic concerning spatial prepositions. Both English and Arabic employ prepositions to express spatial relation, but the two languages differ in dealing with this relation. Spatial relation in English seems to be more diverse and complicated, it branches out to many meanings such as position, dimension, destination, passage, orientation, etc., and some prepositions are used to express more than one meaning at the same time.

In Arabic, however, there are specific spatial meanings each expressed by specific prepositions except with cases in which certain prepositions are used in different meanings.

Moreover, Arabic spatial prepositions are only a limited group and much fewer than English ones, besides, Arabic words that are equivalent to English prepositions(in front of, behind, beside, between, around, through, across, and next to) are not regarded prepositions, they are mainly noun phrases used in adverbial sense. Tables below illustrate use of spatial prepositions in English and Arabic respectively.

English Preps.	Meanings They Express
In	Dimension and destination.
On	Dimension and destination.
At	Dimension.
To	Destination, directional path and implied motion.
From	Negative destination.
Into	Destination, directional path and implied motion.
Onto	Destination.
Away from	Negative destination.
Off	Negative destination.
Out of	Negative destination.
Above	Relative position,

Over	Relative position, directional path, implied motion and orientation.
On top of	Relative position.
Under	Relative position.
Underneath	Relative position.
Below	Relative position.
After	Relative position.
Before	Relative position
Behind	Relative position.
In front of	Relative position.
By	Space (locative relation).
Beside	Space (locative relation).
Close to	Space (locative relation).
Near to	Space (locative relation).
Opposite to	Space (locative relation).
With	Space (locative relation).
Between	Space (positional relation).
Among/amongst	Space (positional relation).
Amid/amidst	Space (positional relation).
About	Space (surrounding position).
(A)round	Space (surrounding position), directional path and orientation.
Across	Passage, directional path and orientation.
Past	Passage and orientation.
Through	Passage and orientation.
Up	Directional path and orientation.
Down	Directional path and orientation.
Along	Directional path.
Towards	Directional path and orientation.
Beyond	Orientation.

Table 1: the use of English spatial prepositions.

Arabic Spatial Preps.	Meanings They Express
في "fi"	Position, destination and passage.
على "ala"	Position and destination.
إلى "ila"	Destination.
من "min"	Negative destination and origin.
بإزاء "bi"	Location and destination.

Table 2: the use of Arabic spatial prepositions.

8. Semantic analysis of spatial prepositions in the 30th part of the Glorious Quran:

Syntactically, Arabic spatial prepositions - like other types - have the same basic functions; wherever found they set their objects into genitive case, and relate them to other parts of sentence. In this section, spatial prepositions will be semantically analyzed as they occur in suras of the 30th part of the Glorious Quran, depending on discussion of spatial relation of prepositions (see 6.3)

1- في "fi"

This preposition occurs in many verses with its different meanings that have been discussed previously.

a- position, which is the most common meaning, and in which this preposition more frequently occurs

لابثين فيها أحقاباً" (النبا:23)"

"Lingering therein for epochs" (Ghali, 2002:582)

ان الابرار لفي نعيم" (الانفطار:13)"

"Surely the constantly benign will indeed be in Bliss" (Ghali, 2002:587)

وألقت ما فيها وتخلت" (الانشقاق:4)"

"And will cast forth what is in it and will void itself" (Ghali, 2002:589)

في لوح محفوظ" (البروج:22)"

"In a preserved Tablet." (Ghali, 2002:590)

ان هذا لفي الصحف الاولى" (الاعلى:18)"

"Surely this is in the earliest Scrolls" (Ghali, 2002:592)

في جنة عالية" (الغاشية:10)"

"In an exalted Garden" (Ghali, 2002:592)

الذين طغوا في البلاد" (الفجر: 11) "

"(They) who tyrannized in the lands" (Ghali, 2002:593)

b- destination, less commonly this preposition occurs in contexts with destination meaning

يوم ينفخ في الصور فتأتون افواجا" (النبأ: 18)

"The Day when the Trumpet will be blown; then you will come up in troops" (Ghali, 2002:582)

كلا لينبذن في الحطمة" (الهمزة: 4)

"Not at all! Indeed he will definitely be flung off into the Crusher" (Ghali, 2002:601)

ورأيت الناس يدخلون في دين الله افواجا" (النصر: 2)

"And you see mankind entering the Religion of Allah in troops" (Ghali, 2002:603)

c- other exceptional meanings, this preposition occurs in certain verses implying other meanings than its basic ones. Most interpreters of Glorious Quran agree that preposition in the following verse implies meaning of "accompaniment", and in this sense the preposition will be equivalent to adverb (بين among)

فادخلي في عبادي" (الفجر: 29)

"So enter among My bondmen!" (Ghali, 2002:594)

Another implied meaning of this preposition is in the following verse, where it meets the meaning of the adverb (حول around)

في جيدها حبل من مسد" (المسد: 5)

"Around her neck she will have a rope of palm-fibers" (Ghali, 2002:603)

2- "ala" على

Many verses contain this preposition with different meanings.

a- position, in which it denotes that an object is on or over another

ووجوه يومئذ عليها غبرة" (عبس: 40)

"And (some) faces upon that Day will be covered by resentment." (Ghali, 2002:585)

كلا بل ران على قلوبهم ما كانوا يكسبون" (المطففين: 14)

"Not at all! No indeed, (but) whatever they were earning has overlaid on their hearts" (Ghali, 2002:588)

على الارائك ينظرون" (المطففين: 23)

“On couches looking (about)” (Ghali, 2002:588)

اذ هم عليها قعود" (البروج:6)

“As they were seated over it” (Ghali, 2002:590)

عليهم نار مؤصدة" (البلد:20)

“Over them is a Fire without any outlet” (Ghali, 2002:594)

b- destination, this preposition rarely occurs with destination meaning in the verses of the 30th part of the Glorious Quran

وما ارسلوا عليهم حافظين" (المطففين:33)

“And in no way were they sent preservers over them” (Ghali, 2002: 588)

وأرسل عليهم طيرا أبابيل" (الفيل:3)

“And He sent upon them baleful birds (in flocks)” (Ghali, 2002:601)

3- “إلى”

This preposition is basically used to express destination, and it has many occurrences

فمن شاء اتخذ الى ربه مآباً" (النبا:39)

“So whoever decides, should seek a restoring to his Lord” (Ghali, 2002:583)

اذهب الى فرعون انه طغى" (النازعات:17)

“Go to Fir’awn; surely he has grown tyrannical”

واذا انقلبوا الى اهلهم انقلبوا فكهين" (المطففين:31)

“And when they turned over to their families, they turned over jesting” (Ghali, 2002:588)

ان الينا ايابهم" (الغاشية:25)

“Surely, to Us is their coming back” (Ghali, 2002:592)

والى ربك فارغب" (الشرح:8)

“And to your Lord then be desirous” (Ghali, 2002:596)

4- “من”

This preposition is used to express negative destination and origin or source.

a- negative destination, only one verse in the 30th part of the Glorious Quran contains this preposition denoting negative destination

يوم يفر المرء من أخيه" (عبس:34)

“On the Day when a person will flee from his brother” (Ghali, 2002:585)

b- origin or source, most occurrences of this preposition denote source

وأنزلنا من المعصرات ماء ثجاجاً (النبا:14)"

"And We have sent down from the clouds pressing forth water cascading" (Ghali, 2002:582)

جزاء من ربك عطاء حساباً (النبا:36)"

"(It is for) recompense from your Lord, a gift, a reckoning" (Ghali, 2002:583)

أخرج منها ماءها ومرعاها (النازعات:31)"

"Therefrom He brought out its water, and its pasture" (Ghali, 2002:584)

يخرج من بين الصلب والترائب (الطارق:7)"

"Going out between the loins and the breastbones" (Ghali, 2002:591)

5- الباء "bi"

As a spatial preposition, this preposition expresses either location or destination.

a- location, the following verses illustrate the use of this preposition denoting location

اذ ناداه ربه بالواد المقدس طوى (النازعات:16)"

"As is Lord called out to him in the supremely holy valley, Tuwa" (Ghali, 2002:584)

فأما من أوتي كتابه بيمينه (الانشقاق:7)"

"So, as for him who is brought his Book in his right (hand)" (Ghali, 2002:589)

وثمود الذين جابوا الصخر بالواد (الفجر:9)"

"And (with) Thamud? Who carved out the rocks in the valley" (Ghali, 2002:593)

وأنت حل بهذا البلد (البلد:2)"

"And you are an inhabitant of this country" (Ghali, 2002:594)

b- destination, only one verse contains this preposition with destination sense

واذا مروا بهم يتغامزون (المطففين:30)"

"And when they passed by them they wink one to another" (Ghali, 2002:588)

c- an exceptional meaning, the preposition in the following verse implies the meaning of (from) denoting source

عينا يشرب بها المقربون (المطففين:28)"

"A spring from which drink the near-stationed" (Ghali, 2002:588)

9. Conclusions:

After reviewing and comparing spatial prepositions in English and Arabic, researcher pointed out some remarks as conclusions for this study. First of all, it is apparently noticed that number of Arabic spatial prepositions is very little compared with that of English. There are about forty prepositions expressing spatial relations in English, while in Arabic, there are only five. Besides, expressing spatial relation seems to be different in both languages. In English, spatial relation is more complicated, and it branches into many meanings which most prepositions share. However, such complication and diversity are not found with Arabic spatial relation.

On the other hand, when analyzing use of spatial prepositions in the 30th part of the Glorious Quran, it has been found out that the five Arabic spatial prepositions are frequently used along all suras of this part, though they are different in their occurrences, as it is summed up in the following:

- 1- (في fi) expressing position has registered the highest occurrence (it occurs in 7 verses with this sense), and less frequently it occurs with a sense of destination (4 verses).
- 2- (على ala) occurs in 5 verses when used for position, and in 2 verses for destination.
- 3- (إلى ila) which only denotes destination, has registered 5 occurrences.
- 4- (من min) denoting negative destination is rarely found in the 30th part of the Glorious Quran, it occurs only in one verse. When used for source, it has 4 occurrences
- 5- (إلى bi) appears in 4 verses to express location, and in only one verse to express destination.

Analysis also shows that certain prepositions, namely (في) and (إلى) have exceptional occurrences with implied meanings different from their basic ones. This is, in fact, a rhetorical matter that seems to be typical for language of the Glorious Quran which is a highly rhetorical one.

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