

AT – A TYPICALLY ENGLISH PREPOSITION*

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0. *Introduction – goals*

This paper presents a contrastive analysis of a (small) part of the prepositional system expressing spatial relations in English and Polish. In particular, I will (i) consider the question of the semantic analysis of the English preposition 'at' expressing a spatial relation (henceforth, the spatial preposition (SpP) 'at') and (ii) compare and contrast these findings with data about the Polish equivalent(s) of 'at'.

In general, I will argue that there is no close correspondence between the English 'at' and its Polish translation(s), as there would be for the English prepositions 'in' and 'on' (in Polish, 'w' respectively 'na'). In other words, the semantic distinctions made by the English language user that elicit the use of 'at' are not made by the Polish speaker.

The present paper will be structured as follows: I will first present a definition of SpP's and sketch the theoretical framework of my analysis. Thereafter, I will define and analyze 'at' and contrast this analysis with the corresponding part of the Polish SpP-system.

1. *Spatial prepositions defined*

Spatial prepositions express how two entities relate to each other in space. In other words, these SpP's describe a relation between an ordered pair of

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arguments x and y in which the SpP indicates the location of an entity x with respect to an entity y , or better with respect to the place referred to by the entity y . As for their notation, SpP's will be represented as a two-place predicate $R(x, y)$ where

x = the located entity

y = the place of location

R = the relation specified by the SpP.

I am aware that there is also a SpP indicating a relation between an ordered triplet of arguments, viz. 'between' and a SpP indicating a relation between an entity and a set of entities, viz. 'among'. Since these two prepositions are only a small subset of the entire set of SpP's and since I will mainly be focussing on 'at', I will henceforth describe SpP's as expressing the spatial relation between two entities.

'At' belongs to the series of *static* SpP's: it expresses a static rather than a dynamic relation, that is, it indicates a static position rather than movement into a particular direction.

2. Theoretical framework of the analysis of SpP's

2.1. A framework for lexical semantics

In what follows, I will shortly sketch my views on word meaning (or lexical semantics), and in so doing, I hope to provide a theoretical framework for the (lexical) semantic analysis of SpP's.¹

Received views on word meaning (the paradigm case is Katz and Fodor (1963)) are based on the idea that the definition of a word or lexical item consists of a set of *semantic features* or semantic components such that a given object is aptly labelled by the word just when it possesses the properties labelled by each feature in the definition. This view, commonly called 'componential analysis' (Fillmore (1975) calls it more disparagingly 'a checklist theory of word meaning'), holds that each lexical item consists of a number of features that amount to a set of necessary and sufficient conditions which a thing must satisfy in order to be an instance of the category labelled by the lexical item. These features nicely distinguish between instance and non-instance. Applicability of a word is a matter of 'yes' or 'no'.

By contrast, prototypical views of word meaning try to account for the fact that semantic categories have blurry edges or that the applicability of a word is very often a matter of degree. In this view, the meaning of a lexical item no longer consists in a set of necessary and sufficient conditions, but it

¹ For a detailed discussion of my ideas on lexical semantics, I refer the reader to Cuyckens (1982 a, b).

consists in a *prototype*. Rosch (1973, 1977) posits that for each lexicalized category, the language user possesses a prototypical example, i.e. a prototype, an ideal example of a category (consisting of a set of typical properties), which serves as a mental point of reference to determine whether a particular object can be referred to by means of that lexical item. As such, the meaning of a lexical item is described as a prototypical or *core meaning*, from which a number of deviant meanings may extend.

Componential analysis and prototype semantics are not incompatible in that the principles underlying componential analysis can be applied to the notion prototype. Indeed, we can consider a prototype as an unanalyzed concept from which a number of *prototypical inferences* depart (instead of analytic entailments, as in traditional (i. e. Katz and Fodor (1963)) componential analysis). In Cuyckens (1982b), I called this 'convergence' between componential analysis and prototype semantics a system of 'inferential word semantics'.

It is within this system of inferential word semantics that I want to analyze the semantic structure of SpP's. In sum, SpP's will be analyzed componentially, i.e. by describing their meaning in terms of a number of semantic components and at the same time, this componential semantic analysis of SpP's will be analyzed in terms of the notion prototype.

2.2. The relational character of SpP's

A second pillar of the theoretical framework for SpP-analysis deals with the relational character of SpP's. Before going into this, it is necessary to introduce the distinction between *setting* and *relational* SpP's.² Therefore, consider sentence (1).

(1) The apple is *in* the bowl.

Sentences such as (1) in which a setting SpP occurs can be paraphrased as (1')

(1') The bowl is the place where the apple is located.

In these types of sentences, there exists a binary relation between the entity x (i.e. 'the apple') and the place referred to as y (i.e. 'the bowl'). A setting SpP indicates that x or the situation/action of x is situated precisely where y is situated.

² These terms were initially introduced in Dutch by Klooster, Verkuyl and Luif (1973) and were translated in English by Van Langendonck (1978). Unfortunately, the term 'relational' has a technical meaning (in contrast to 'setting') and a non-technical meaning in the phrase 'the relational character of SpP's'.

By contrast, sentences such as (2), in which a relational SpP occurs cannot be paraphrased as (2') but must be paraphrased as (2''):

- (2) The man is in front of the gate.
 (2') *The gate is the place where the man is situated.
 (2'') The place where the man is situated is located in front of the place referred to as the gate.

In these types of sentences, there exists a ternary relation between the entity *x* (i.e. 'the man'), the place referred to by *y* (i.e. 'the gate') and the actual locale of *x*.

Unlike for setting SpP's where the place referred to as *y* coincides with the place taken by *x*, relational SpP's do not display this coincidence. In other words, if we state that setting SpP's describe the spatial relation between the (situation/action of the) entity *x* and the place of *x*, which is in fact the place taken by the entity *y*, relational SpP's have nothing to say about the relation between the entity *x* and the place taken by *x*. They are only concerned with the spatial relation between the entity *x* and the place referred to as *y*, which is located elsewhere.

In section 1., SpP's were defined as expressing a *relationship* between a located entity *x* and a place of location *y*. The relational character of relational SpP's is quite evident: relational SpP's indicate the spatial relation of an entity *x* with respect to a place of location, referred to by an entity *y*. In quite a number of studies on SpP's, the relational character of setting SpP's is insufficiently emphasized (e.g. Quirk, et al. (1972), Clark (1973)). Although these authors correctly emphasize the role of the argument *y* in selecting a particular setting SpP (as such, 'in' would be selected when *y* denotes a volume or area), their semantic characterization of setting SpP's is not incorrect, but insufficient. As I already stated, setting SpP's describe a *binary relation* between the (action/situation of the) entity *x* and the place of location *y*, specifying that the entity *x* is situated precisely where the entity referred to as *y* is located. This information is formalized in (3)

- (3) PLACE (*x*, *y*) or INCL (*x*, REGION(*y*)).

3. Analysis of 'at'

3.0. Preliminaries

In the foregoing pages, I have sketched a framework for the analysis of SpP's. Along these lines, I will now investigate the *componential* semantic analysis of the *prototypical* spatial *relation* expressed by 'at'. A large section of this paper will thus be taken by the discussion of 'at' in English. In section 4., I will contrast and compare my findings about 'at' with data from Polish.

3.1. Existing semantic analyses of 'at' — problems

Some of the best known descriptions of 'at' to date are those by Bennett, Cooper, Leech and Lindkvist. These semantic descriptions range from Bennett's very concise characterization of 'at' up to Linkvist's very lengthy and detailed discussion.

Bennett (1975) simply defines 'at' as "locative *y*", Cooper (1968) and Leech (1969) respectively as "x is near or in *y*" and "x is contiguous or juxtaposed to the place of *y*, where the dimensionality of *y* is not significant". Although these analyses are not wrong, they are insufficient. Consider the following sentences.

- (4) The man *at* the wall.
 (5) The man *at* the table.
 (6) Meet me *at* the post office.
 (7) Meet me *at* the Market Place.
 (8) They put up camps *at* strategic points.
 (9) *The man *at* the living room.

From these examples, it would appear that 'at' indicates

- (i) proximity (cf. (4) and (5));
 (ii) proximity or coincidence (cf. (6) and (7)).
 (iii) coincidence (cf. (8));

As a first approximation of the semantic analysis of 'at', I take the terms 'coincidence' and 'proximity' to be intuitively clear. A more formal definition will follow later.

Leech's definition fails to characterize 'at' in terms of (ii) and (iii); Cooper's characterization is defective with respect to (ii).³ Bennett's definition also leaves us at a loss, because, general as it is, it fails to explain why for instance 'x at *y*' can be taken to mean 'x in *y*' (to use Cooper's terminology) in (6), whereas in (9), it cannot. Yet, both occurrences of 'at' in (6) and (9) are perfectly characterizable as 'locative *y*'. I will also argue that 'at' has a general meaning, but there is more to the story than what Bennett has told us.

Lindkvist's (1968) account differs from the previous ones in that it provides a very detailed picture of all the possible uses of the SpP 'at'. As a result of his craving for detail, the picture Lindkvist presents is sometimes rather unsystematic. Roughly, he distinguishes four meanings of the SpP 'at' (each meaning is further divided still):

- "a. location in close proximity to an object;
 b. location within an area or space or on a surface apprehended as a point;
 c. relative position;

³ I take 'or' in Cooper's definition as an exclusive or.

d. location close to or within a body, surface or area thought of as being used to serve a certain purpose;" (Lindkvist 1968 : 129).

'Relative position' is described as indicating a point in a whole, series or continuity. So, on close inspection, Lindkvist's meanings a. through c. (we will deal with d. later) approximate meanings (i) and (ii).⁴

However, I stated that it 'would appear' that 'at' displays the three meanings (i) through (iii). This characterization of 'at' in terms of (i) through (iii), and hence also Lindkvist's account (and *a fortiori* Cooper's and Leech's accounts) fail to recognize an important fact about the semantics of 'at'. Indeed, it does not indicate

- I. why 'at' can *only* indicate proximity in (4) and (5);
- II. why 'at' indicates proximity or coincidence in (6) and (7);
- III. why 'at' can *only* indicate coincidence in (8) and
- IV. why 'at' cannot be used at all in (9).

A description of 'at' in terms of proximity, coincidence, or proximity V coincidence⁵ may be descriptively adequate, but it is certainly not explanatorily adequate, because it misses an essential point about the semantics of 'at', which I have negatively characterized in terms of I. — IV. and which I will positively characterize as follows. 'At' expresses a very general meaning from which more specific meanings (i) — (iii) or Lindkvist's a. — c. (and also d., as will be shown later) can be derived and which simultaneously solves problems I. — IV. But, I do not want to run ahead of myself, so I will first of all define 'at'.

3.2. 'at' defined

In order to reach a definition of 'at', I will first shortly sketch the semantic structure of the other setting SpP's 'in' and 'on'.⁶ 'In' is analyzed as

$$(10) \text{ IN } (x, y) \rightarrow \text{PLACE } (x, y) \\ \rightarrow \text{INCL } (x, \text{ENCLOSING AREA}(y)).$$

'On' is analyzed as

$$(11) \text{ ON } (x, y) \rightarrow \text{PLACE } (x, y) \\ \rightarrow \text{INCL } (x, \text{SURFACE}(y)).$$

I realize that there is some overlap between the PLACE-component and the

⁴ The fact that 'at' may indicate proximity or coincidence (meaning (iii)) is recognized in Lindkvist (1978 : 53).

⁵ To avoid confusion, I am using the logical operator 'V' to represent 'or' in meaning (iii).

⁶ For the semantic analysis of 'in' and 'on', I am drawing on Cuyckens (1981; 1982e).

second component of both definitions (PLACE(x, y) was equated in (3) with INCL (x, REGION(y))), but PLACE(x, y) is explicitly represented to indicate that both 'in' and 'on' are setting SpP's.

How does this discussion of 'in' and 'on' relate to our attempt to define 'at'? In the analysis of 'in' and 'on', the physical properties of the entity y, viz. 'enclosing area' and 'surface' are of enormous importance. These selection criteria for 'in' and 'on' are considered irrelevant for the analysis of 'at'. The place of location y, in so far as it has any dimensions, is considered a *dimensionless* entity, often regarded as a point of recognition or a landmark. 'At' simply associates an entity x with the place referred to by the entity y, thought of as a point, so that y is the place where x is situated. Hence, the only relevant component in the semantic analysis of 'at' is the PLACE-component. In other words, 'at' expresses a PLACE-relation with an entity y, thought of as a point or dimensionless entity:

$$(12) \text{ AT}(x, y) \rightarrow \text{PLACE}(x, \text{POINT}(y)).$$

Recall that in (3), we further defined PLACE(x, y) as INCL (x, REGION(y)). In keeping with the fact that we want to consider INCL (x, REGION(y)) as a perfect equivalent of PLACE(x, y), REGION(y) must be defined as that place for which holds that x is precisely situated there. Now, as AT(x, y) was defined as PLACE(x, POINT(y)), an equivalent definition of 'at' is

$$(13) \text{ AT}(x, y) \rightarrow \text{INCL } (x, \text{REGION}(\text{POINT}(y))).$$

I claim that the SpP 'at' is semantically a very narrow concept: it simply states that the (action/situation of the) entity x is included in the region of the place referred to by the entity y which is apprehended as a point. So, in fact, 'at' has a very abstract or general meaning. In other words, the 'at'-phrase is simply indefinite with respect to the physical properties (e.g. surface, enclosing area) of the place of location y. In sum, 'at' may only be assigned the general meaning represented in (13).

In the following section, we will argue that such semantic characterizations as proximity/coincidence/proximity V coincidence can only arise depending on the context in which 'at' occurs.

3.3. 'at' further specified

In this section, I will investigate how this general definition of 'at' gives rise to more specific semantic distinctions, *depending on the context in which 'at' occurs*. This context of 'at' is mostly the y-phrase (the place of location). So, I claim that such semantic distinctions as proximity/coincidence/proximity V coincidence are not part of the semantics of 'at' *stricto sensu*, but they are part of the semantic characterization of the sentence or context in which

'at' occurs. In following this general strategy, that is assigning a general meaning to 'at', combined with a further investigation of the context of 'at' so as to derive further semantic specifications, I hope to solve problems I. through IV. (section 3.1.) and simultaneously provide an explanatorily adequate account of the semantic analysis of 'at'.

3.3.1. *problems I. — II.*

In this section, I want to investigate why the general meaning of 'at' is sometimes realized as 'proximity' as in (4) and (5), and sometimes as 'proximity V coincidence' as in (6) and (7). Recall that the description of 'at' in terms of (i) through (iii) (section 3.1.) could not answer this problem.

- (4) The man *at* the wall.
- (5) The man *at* the table.
- (6) Meet me *at* the post office.
- (7) Meet me *at* the Market Place.

The general semantic definition of 'at' stipulates that 'at' is lexicalized when x is simply located on the same locale as the entity y , considered as a point. In other words, 'at' is lexicalized when x enters into an INCL-relation with REGION (POINT(y)).

Theoretically speaking, this REGION(y) covers the points taken by the entity y itself, as well as points outside y . However, in sentence (6), the area inside and outside the post office is covered by 'at' whereas in (4), only the area beside the wall is covered by 'at'. As I already stated, in order to solve this problem, we must turn our attention to the context of 'at', in particular to the place of location y .

As a general principle, I want to propose the following. Whenever a language user considers the entity y as dimensionless, as a point, and when he wants to lexicalize an INCL-relation between x and the place referred to as the entity y (considered as a point), which is part of REGION(y), then he may resort to 'at', unless — and this happens quite often — the entity y resists being apprehended as a point when it enters into this INCL-relation because the physical properties of y are conceptually dominant. In this case, the speaker must resort to such SpP's as 'in' and 'on'.

If the entity y resists being apprehended as a point when y itself enters into an INCL-relation with x , due to the physical properties of y , y may however be apprehended as a point when the *remaining* points outside or beside y (which also belong to REGION(y)) enter into an INCL-relation with x . At this point, there is no more INCL-relation between x and y itself.

I will illustrate this principle by means of (14)

- (14) He is sitting *at* his rocking chair.

In this sentence, the entity y , viz. 'rocking chair', always defines an enclosing area (the function of a rocking chair is to 'enclose' x). Therefore, the entity y can never be apprehended as a point when the speaker wants to consider an INCL-relation with y itself. However, an INCL-relation with the points *beside* y is perfectly possible, while y itself is considered as a point. I think this explains why 'at' can only indicate proximity in sentences such as (14): only the points belonging to REGION(y) that are situated beside y can enter into an INCL-relation with x when y is considered as a point. The space taken by the entity y itself is automatically considered as an enclosing area when it enters into an INCL-relation with x .

We should still answer the question in what instances the physical properties of y are 'conceptually dominant', so that they preclude the entity y from being apprehended as a point. Consider also sentences (15) and (16)

- (15) The man *at* the closet.
- (16) He is *at* his bed.

In sentences (14) through (16), the function of the entity y triggers off the label 'enclosing area'. 'A closet' in (15) is functionally an enclosing area in that it is a container for clothes; a 'rocking chair' in (14) functions as an enclosing area for the person located in it. The same goes for 'his bed' in (16). In all these cases, the entity y is automatically considered as an enclosing area, thus precluding the INCL-relation between x and the entity y itself to be covered by 'at'. The entity y may be considered as a point when x enters into an INCL-relation with the remaining points of REGION(y), i.e. the points beside y . Therefore, if 'at' is used in these sentences, it can only be further specified as expressing 'proximity'.

In the same vein, we can explain why 'at' in (5) only has a proximity reading. The entity y , viz. 'table', has the prominent function of being a supporting surface for objects. For that reason, an INCL-relation between the entity y itself and x must be lexicalized as 'on'. In keeping with the general principle discussed above, 'at' only retains a proximity reading.

Not only the function of the entity y may immediately coin y as an enclosing area. When the entity y enters into a part-whole (be it inherent or accidental) relation with x , then y is automatically considered as an enclosing area, so that 'at' cannot be used to indicate this INCL-relation between x and the entity y itself. 'At' may however be used to indicate the INCL-relation between x and the points beside y , when y is apprehended as a point, so that sentences such as (4) only have a proximity reading.

Summing up problem I., which I have only discussed up to now, the space taken by the entity y itself is automatically considered as an enclosing area when it enters into an INCL-relation with x . As such, since the entity y cannot be considered dimensionless, 'at' cannot be used to lexicalize the INCL-

-relation between x and the entity y itself. Only the other points of $REGION(y)$, those situated *beside* y , can enter into an INCL-relation with x , when y is considered as a point. I will now get down to problem II., which is closely related to I.

Consider sentence (6). The entity y in (6), viz. 'post office' is much more neutral with respect to the label 'enclosing area', that is the entity y itself (as part of $REGION(y)$) does not necessarily emerge as an enclosing area, when the speaker considers an INCL-relation between x and the entity y . 'Post office' is only considered as an enclosing area when the speaker deliberately wants to consider it as such. In other words, when the speaker wants to lexicalize an INCL-relation x and the entity y , y itself can be considered as a point or dimensionless entity, so that the speaker can safely resort to 'at' to cover this relation between x and the entity y considered as a point. Moreover, 'at' may also be used to cover the INCL-relation between x and the remaining points of $REGION(y)$, when y is considered as a point. Therefore, 'at' in sentence (6) indicates proximity \vee coincidence. A similar line of reasoning holds for (7).

Summing up, the context of 'at', i.e. the entity y , makes that in some cases (e.g. (4)), 'at' can be further specified as $PROXIMITY(x, POINT(y))$, and in other cases (e.g. (6)) as $PROXIMITY(x, POINT(y)) \vee INCL(x, POINT(y))$. $INCL(x, POINT(y))$ is often referred to as 'coincidence'; $PROXIMITY(x, POINT(y))$ can be defined as $INCL(x, REGION(y)) \setminus INCL(x, POINT(y))$. In other words, depending on y , the general meaning of 'at' may be further specified as $PROXIMITY(x, POINT(y))$ or $PROXIMITY(x, POINT(y)) \vee INCL(x, POINT(y))$. Two things should be kept in mind.

1. I stated 'further specified' because 'at' evidently keeps its general meaning.

2. Proximity or proximity \vee coincidence are not part of the semantics of 'at' *stricto sensu*, but they are part of the semantic characterization of the sentence (or context) in which 'at' occurs. 'At' itself does not indicate proximity, because in that case, the speaker would select 'by' or 'near'.

3.3.2. problem III.

Problem III. addresses the question why sentences such as (8) preferably only express 'coincidence' (i.e. $INCL(x, POINT(y))$).

(8) They put up camps *at* strategic points.

Similar examples are

(17) They crossed the border *at* three points.

(18) Faults in the rock are traceable *at* various points along the coast.

(19) Chicago is *at* the point where East and West meet.

Two factors come into play here.

1. Unlike the sentences we have dealt with so far, in which y (the place of location), although apprehended as a point, refers to a particular space occupied (an area, volume, line), y makes no reference to a space occupied in (8) and (17)–(19). In these cases, the speaker does not reckon with the fact that the entity y actually covers more than one point. He simply deals with y as a point, without taking its spatial extension into account. Compare sentences (4) and (6) where the spatial extension of y is more clearly present, although y itself can be apprehended as a point.

2. When the entity y is a point, i.e. has no spatial extension, the only characterization of $REGION(y)$ that I can come up with is y itself. Indeed, when an entity y is unambiguously and exhaustively circumscribed by its boundaries, then every x , located outside y cannot be said to be included in the place referred to as y . Hence, x fails to meet the condition for inclusion within the $REGION(y)$, which is precisely the criterion for 'at'. Evidently, when y denotes a point, these boundaries are taken to be very minimal, but the general principle still holds: a point located outside another point referred to as y cannot be said to be included in the place referred to as y . Therefore, 'at' can only cover those relationships that express coincidence of x with a point y .

3.3.3. problem IV.

Problem IV. is a clearer instance of the general principle just outlined in 3.3.2. I have already mentioned sentence (9) as an illustration of this problem.

(9) *The man *at* the living room.

I will first discuss a similar example (20)

(20) *Our spy *at* Belgium.

'At' can never express the relation between our spy (x) and Belgium (y) in sentence (20) because

1. Belgium automatically defines an enclosing area when it enters into an INCL-relation with x . This constraint on 'at' does not suffice, because similar examples such as (21) still allow 'at' indicating proximity.

(21) The man *at* the closet.

So, a second criterion must come into play.

2. This second criterion is an instantiation of the general principle described above. Conceptually, a country is exhaustively and unambiguously circumscribed by its boundaries, so that every x located outside the country cannot be included in the $REGION$ of the country. Indeed, the following

paraphrase will not hold: any *x* located outside *y* cannot be said to be included in the place referred to as *y* (i.e. the country), hence the criterion for 'at' is not met.

Cities and towns are not as restrictive in this respect: their boundaries are not as clearly marked so that they allow for collocation with 'at' as in (22)

(22) Our spy *at* London.

However, sometimes it is possible to indicate a PLACE-relation with a SpP such as 'at' when a country is, especially in earlier times, considered very far away. In that case, a country is more apt to being apprehended as a point. Compare (23)

(23) They have got a plantation *at* Paraguay.

Let us now get back to sentence (9). 'At' cannot be used to indicate a PLACE-relation with 'living room' (nor to indicate a proximity relation, nor to indicate a coincidence relation). The fact that 'living room' is functionally an enclosing area when it enters into an INCL-relation with *x* prohibits the use of 'at' (cf. (14), (15), (16)). Moreover, conceptually, 'living room' is considered as a clearly marked/circumscribed area so that according to the general principle illustrated in (20), the SpP 'at' cannot be used to indicate a proximity relation either.

3.3.4. *Summing up*

The context in which 'at' occurs makes that 'at', beside its general meaning, is further specified as indicating proximity, coincidence or proximity v coincidence.

I. If *x* enters into an INCL-relation with an entity *y* that is automatically considered as an enclosing area, then this relation will never be lexicalized as 'at'. In these cases, 'at' only indicates proximity of *x* with respect to *y* (next to the general meaning of 'at'). (cf. sentences (4) and (5)).

II. When *x* enters into an INCL-relation with an entity *y*, not automatically considered as an enclosing area, 'at' can be taken to mean either proximity or coincidence. (Cf. sentences (6) and (7)).

III. When REGION(*y*) is restricted to *y* itself, 'at' can only indicate coincidence. (Cf. sentences (8) and (17)–(19)).

IV. 'At' cannot be used at all when *y* equals REGION(*y*) (cf. III) and on top of that, when *y* is always considered as an enclosing area when it enters into an INCL-relation with *x*. (Cf. sentences (9) and (20)).

Once more, I want to emphasize that these further specifications indicated by 'at' are not part of the meaning of 'at' *stricto sensu*, but that they are part

of the meaning of the sentence or context in which 'at' occurs. 'At' itself only has the very general meaning which we described as INCL(*x*, REGION-POINT(*y*)).

3.4. *Further pragmatic specifications of 'at'*

Before starting a short contrastive discussion, I would like to complete the semantic picture of 'at' in English. Let us therefore go back to Lindkvist's enumeration of the different meanings of 'at'. Lindkvist (1968 : 129) defines his fourth separate meaning of 'at' as follows:

"location close to or within a body, surface or area thought of as being used to serve a certain purpose".

The following sentences exemplify this so-called 'separate meaning'.

(24) He works *at* the factory.

(25) He works *at* the mill.

(26) He is *at* the university.

(27) He is *at* his desk.

(28) He is *at* his office.

Just like the other three meanings that Lindkvist proposes (cf. section 3.1.), this meaning can also be reduced to the general semantic characterization of 'at' (cf. (13)). However, in this case, the allegedly separate meaning is not a further semantic specification induced by the context of 'at', but it is a *conversational implicature* of the sentence in which 'at' occurs. 'At' itself simply expresses the general PLACE-relation as defined above. The fact that in (24), *x* (he) is an employee of the factory, i.e. works there, is merely a *conversational implicature* of (24), because it can easily be cancelled: cf. (24')

(24') He is *at* the factory, which doesn't mean that he works there, but he is picking up his wife there.

Also other, allegedly separate meanings of 'at' can be dealt with in terms of conversational implicatures. Some authors take (29) and (30) respectively to mean 'in front of' and 'looking through'.

(29) He is *at* the door.

(30) He is standing *at* the window.

These alleged meanings are merely conversational implicatures of (29) and (30).

Conversational implicatures may also further specify the meaning of 'at'. Consider (31)

(31) The hearing *at* the court.

Although 'at' in this sentence indicates proximity V coincidence (as a semantic

specification of the general meaning of 'at'), (31) conversationally implies that the hearing occurs within the court (because a hearing usually occurs within the court house), and thus restricts the meaning of 'at' to coincidence. However, this conversational implicature can easily be cancelled.

4. English and Polish contrasted

English conceptualizes 'at' as a SpP with one basic meaning (viz., INCL(x, REGION(POINT(y))))), from which further specifications may be derived depending on the context in which 'at' occurs. These further specifications may be of a semantic or pragmatic nature (e.g. 'proximity' in (4) is a further semantic specification of (4), whereas 'functionality' in (24)–(28) is a pragmatic one). Again, these specifications are part of the meaning of the sentence in which 'at' occurs and not of 'at' as such.

From a contrastive point of view, 'at' has no counterpart in Polish (or in German or Dutch). The Polish speaker does not conceptualize a spatial relation between an entity x and an entity y apprehended as dimensionless, i.e. as a point. Therefore, the further specifications (be they semantic or pragmatic) of the general 'at' that are made in English, must be rendered by another, more specific means (i.e. more specific SpP) in Polish, which considers the entity y in its full fledged spatial extensionality.

1. As such, when an English sentence (cf. (4)) in which 'at' occurs expresses proximity of x with respect to an entity y apprehended as a point, Polish will have to lexicalize this relationship by means of a more specific SpP that can only indicate proximity between x and y (without y being considered as a point): 'przy' (by, near).

2. When 'at' in sentence (6) indicates proximity coincidence, Polish will translate this SpP either as 'w' (in), 'na' (on) or 'przy' (by): it does not offer an exact equivalent of 'at', but it must choose a more specific SpP.

3. When 'at' indicates coincidence (cf. (8)), Polish will translate 'at' as 'w' or 'na', depending on whether x enters into an INCL-relation with an enclosing area y or with a surface y.

4. When the sentence in which 'at' occurs conversationally implies the notion 'functionality', Polish speakers will again have to resort to a SpP that lexicalizes a specific spatial relationship, whereas English simply uses the general 'at'. The functionality will have to be expressed by other means (e.g. by the verb). Indeed, Polish must translate "He is *at* the factory" as "He is *in* the factory", in which case the conversational implicature disappears. In order to express the notion 'functionality', the Polish speaker may have to resort to the verb 'work'.

Summing up, while English speakers can render particular spatial relations by means of the SpP 'at', which has the general meaning of inclusion

of x within the region of the entity y, apprehended as a point and which relies on the rest of the sentence for further specification, Polish must always lexicalize these specifications from the start: it does not have an equivalent for the general 'at'.

I am not claiming that the specific Polish SpP is equivalent to the English 'at', augmented with further specifications from the sentence. As such, 'at the gate' does not mean the same as 'przy bramie', because 'at the gate' renders the notion proximity with respect to an entity apprehended as a point whereas Polish considers 'przy bramie' as the expression of a spatial relationship between an entity x and an entity y which has a full fledged spatial extensionality. The same holds, mutatis mutandis, for the Polish translations 'w' and 'na' of 'at'.

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