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Figure and Ground: Prominence view in locative relations rendered by prepositions
'in,' 'on,' 'at,' 'to,' and 'over' depicted in written text taken from the section 'letter
from' from the British online newspaper 'The Guardian'

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Abstract

Among the abilities that human mind has, there is the one of perceiving prominent objects because of its shape, color, or any other characteristic that could call our attention according to the context. In this thesis, what is intended to be demonstrated is that what our mind is able to segregate can be verbalized by means of using the language.

The linguistic devices analyzed in this research are prepositions of place (in, on, at, to and over) and the locative relations established between the connections that they provide are observed and described in order to demonstrate how human mind works in order to organize things, people and places in the space.

The corpus of this research was elaborated with 12 letters taken from the section 'Letters from' from the weekly online version of a British newspaper called 'The Guardian'. The letters were divided into sentences that contained prepositions **in**, **on**, **at**, **to** and **over** which depicted locative relations.

After going through the analysis, the results demonstrated that the prepositions play a key role when establishing the prominence of an entity since they are in charge of positioning one entity (figure) as the focus of attention in relation to other entity (ground). Each preposition plays a different role depending on the context they are set and the meaning that the writer wants to depict.

Agradecimientos

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1. Introduction

Since childhood, we are able to place ourselves somewhere and understand that there are objects around us. Of course we do not have enough knowledge or experience to notice that we can verbalize what we visualize but we are able to understand when adults give us commands as looking up, down, going in, among others. From those very simple structures, our minds start to recognise locations which in those cases are rendered by prepositions. When we get older, those structures may be more complex and linguistic relations can be established.

The concept of Prominence (Ungerer and Schmid, 1996) is closely related in the way in which we perceive reality. Linguists have recently viewed this concept from a grammatical, pragmatic, and semantic point of view (Langacker, 1991).

The prominence principle is based on concepts of profiling and figure/ground segregation, a phenomenon first introduced by the Danish gestalt Psychologist Edgar Rubin (Ungerer and Schmid, 1996). When we look at an object in our environment, we single it out as a perceptually prominent figure standing out from the ground. This characteristic of our cognition is referred to as the 'Prominence Principle.'

Landau and Jackendoff (1993), mention in their theory that humans have the ability to express spatial experience through language, by means of figure and ground, they explain how humans locate entities according to their physical characteristics. They describe the functions of the figure and the ground and give a notion that there are verbs that incorporate locative relations. They do not focus their research on prepositions but they express that prepositions play key role in locative relations.

This study intends to describe the connection between visual and linguistic perception and demonstrate that language can also be analyzed by means of prominence when placing individual language-uses in context. As such, the fundamental aim of this study is to focus on the prepositions **in**, **on**, **at**, **to**, and **over** analysing corpora and showing that the prominence of entities identified by linguistic units explain cognitive theories presented as figure and ground. According to Evans (2007:79), the figure “is an entity that, among other things, possesses a dominant shape, due to a definite contour or prominent colouring. The figure stands out against the ground, the part of the scene that is relegated to background” and ground as reference object (Evans, 2007:179)¹.

This research study benefited from face/vase illusion, first introduced by Psychologist Edgar Rubin to relate human perceptual illusion to the application of the principle of prominence in linguistic studies, especially to the study of locative relations. Ungerer and Schmid (1996) define figure/ground relationships as rendered by prepositions and grammatical relations. This idea had been previously presented by Lakoff (1987) and Langacker (1990). In their studies, they assimilated the prominence principle to the construction of sentences that contain subject and object, but lack prepositions.

The presentation of this thesis follows a logical sequence. First I will present the research problem, where I will explain briefly what happens with the corpus and the theory that I want to contrast. Then I will present the research questions followed by the objectives of the research. The next step will be to present the theoretical framework that contains all the necessary information regarding figure and ground and the locative relations. Next section describes

¹ Reference object (also ground) The less salient element in figure-ground organization. Developed in cognitive linguistics in particular by *Leonard Talmy* in his *Conceptual Structuring System Approach*. (See also figure, Gestalt psychology, landmark.)

methodological procedures of the research. Then the following section presents my hypothesis before showing the section where I analyze and show the results of the research. Finally, a discussion, conclusion and limitations of the study are presented.

2. Research Problem

Humans have the ability to perceive objects and decide visually which will carry the prominence, by means of locative relations rendered by prepositions; linguists seek to explain how human mind works in order to transform those visual images into language.

There are authors who present their theories and refer to figure and ground or trajectory and landmark, give examples but they do not apply their theories to real examples. That is the reason why this research intends to apply the theories presented by well known authors to real material produced by people without the intention of producing it for the purposes of this research.

This thesis focuses on the analysis of some locative prepositions (**in**, **on**, **at**, **to** and **over**), there are more on the list of this category that could be useful in other research.

3. Research Questions

- 3.1. How can the prominence principle introduced by the psychologist Edgar Rubin be applied to the study of language in terms of locative relations rendered by prepositions **in**, **on**, **at**, **to**, and **over** established in written text taken from the section 'letter from' from the British online newspaper 'The Guardian'?
- 3.2. What are the aspects introduced by experts to apply the prominence principle to the study of language in terms of locative relations rendered by prepositions **in**, **on**, **at**, **to**, and **over** depicted in written text taken from the section 'letter from' from the British online newspaper 'The Guardian'?
- 3.3. What is/are the relation/s between figure and ground, in terms of locative relations rendered by prepositions **in**, **on**, **at**, **to**, and **over** depicted in written text taken from the section 'letter from' from the British online newspaper 'The Guardian'?

4. Objectives

4.1. General Objectives

4.1.1. To establish the validity of analysing written text taken from the section 'letter from' from the British online newspaper 'The Guardian' as corpus to demonstrate the Prominence principle focusing on the dichotomy of figure and ground rendered by prepositions **in**, **on**, **at**, **to**, and **over**.

4.2. Specific Objectives

4.2.1. To identify the aspects of the prominence principle that apply to the study of language in terms of locative relations rendered by prepositions **in**, **on**, **at**, **to**, and **over** depicted in written text taken from the section 'letter from' from the British online newspaper 'The Guardian'.

4.2.2. To establish possible relationship between the application of figure and ground to the study of locative relations rendered by prepositions **in**, **on**, **at**, **to**, and **over** depicted in written text taken from the section 'letter from' from the British online newspaper 'The Guardian'.

5. Theoretical Framework

5.1. Figure and ground

Since infancy, humans have the ability to place themselves and the objects around them in a physical space. As such, we are able to understand that what we see can be verbalized by means of using the language. According to Lee (2001), the way in which we talk about space is illustrated with three basic locative prepositions which are **in**, **on** and **at**.

There are studies which include prepositions, space, figure and ground (or referring to them as other names given by other authors as trajector and landmark or dimensionality) and in general they agree that language and spatial expressions have some common characteristics.

From a structuralist perspective and according to Greenbaum and Quirk (1994), prepositions establish connecting relations between two entities forming prepositional phrases with different functions. Greenbaum and Quirk (1990:190) define prepositions as 'small number of monosyllabic items such as **at**, **for**, **in**, **on**, **to**, **with**, typically unstressed and often with reduced vowel except when deferred' and make divisions and sub divisions to give them different meanings according to their functions. They establish categories as Space (position and direction, relative position, passage), Time (time position, time duration), Cause and purpose, from means to stimulus, Accompaniment, Concession and other relations, and Modification. For the purposes of this study, I will take into account the space category since locative relations are the focus of the analysis. Lyons (1977) proposes a 'positional' aspect in the prepositional relations determined by the dimensionality which is the term used by him to refer to the characterization of the ground in terms of geometric properties (Muñoz 2003).

In his work, Muñoz (2003), presents a discussion of relevant concepts when referring to prepositions **in**, **on**, and **at** in English and preposition **en** in Spanish; he

describes all the instances where the prepositions are used and builds a theory where he concludes that each of the preposition in English has a meaning and a function but in Spanish one preposition is used for the same purposes.

When referring to dimension, Lyons (1977) makes reference to orientation, up-down, front-back, right-left and he takes into account the differences between inherent, canonical and actual orientation of entities showing that there are some entities such as the mountains, buildings or trees that are inherently oriented in vertical dimension but may also be canonically oriented in the front-back dimension. When referring to geometric properties, the preposition *at* does not fit with the characteristics needed.

David Lee (2001), in his major area of interest which is language and perspective, attempts to make a clear view of his theory by presenting his research about space. As humans, since we are very young, we are able to relate the objects in a physical space and give them characteristics according to their shapes. Lee also agrees that the words in charge of the representation of the space are **up, down, in, out, on, off**, among others. Space not only refers to physical location but also to establishing spatial relationships as when we say that someone occupies a 'high' position in society, we refer to up-down axis. When we use the expression 'in trouble', we use 'trouble' as a container, and when we refer to a 'close' relationship with a person, we refer to physical proximity. Lee considers that there is a very basic area to refer to space itself and to illustrate this, he considers three basic locative prepositions **in, on** and **at**. Where **in** forms part of constructions where the landmark acts as a container, **on** as a supporting surface and *at* involves a construal of trajector and landmark as geometric points and tends to establish a locative relation between them.

Evans (2007), from Talmy's and Langacker's theories of figure-ground and trajector-landmark gives notions of the relations between the mentioned terms by putting all together . He proposes that 'trajector' is most prominent in a profiled

relationship, where there are two or more participants in a given scene, while 'landmark' is secondary.

In the year 1915, the psychologist Edgar Rubin presented a set of images with double or ambiguous forms. The more famous image produced an effect known as the Rubin face (figure 2) or the figure-ground and became an icon of the prominence view, which later became an important issue for linguists to study local and grammatical relations.

“When we look at an object in our environment, we single it out as a perceptually prominent figure standing out from the ground. The same principle of prominence is valid in the structure of language. For example, in locative relations like in 'The book is on the table', *the book* is conceptualized as the figure (Ungerer and Schmid, 1996:156).”

The prominence principle explains why, when we look at an object in our environment, we single it out as a perceptually prominent figure standing out from the ground. This theory is also known as 'figure-ground segregation'. Our mind is not developed enough to identify more than one entity at once, so through an unconscious process it decides to perceive one first and then the other. This process of segregation will depend on the observer's point of view (Ungerer and Schmid, 1996).

Rubin (in Evans 2007), describes the figure as appearing to be thing-like, have a prominent shape, it is closer to the viewer and in front of the ground, while the ground is less dominant, is behind the figure, it has a substance-like shape, it is formless and difficult to remember.

Up to now, the prominence principle has been applied only to images and visual entities. This study intends to apply the same principle to figure and ground in language since we can verbalize what we see. For example, just as there is a preferred way of seeing the spatial location of a dog relative to a tree shown in

Figure 1, there is a preferred way of construing and describing this situation. Thus, it is more natural to say 'the dog is next to the tree' than 'the tree is next to the dog'. The former description takes part of our normal figure-ground arrangement while the latter might apply to a scene in which a big dog stands next to a little tree (Radden and Dirven 2007). Even though 'the tree is next to the dog' is grammatically correct, the dog is more likely to be moved around than the tree, so the description would have no sense and the dog (figure) seems to be more prominent than the tree (ground). Evans (2007), taking into account Talmy's theory, agrees that the figure represents smaller and more movable objects, while the ground represents larger and more immovable objects and serving to locate objects.



Figure n° 1: The concept of figure and ground in both visual and linguistic

According to Landau and Jackendoff (1993), it is a human characteristic that we have the ability to express something spatial through language. In their work, they focus on language of objects and places in English. They seek to find relations among the senses and establish spatial relations from vision, audition, and touch.

As we have seen above, there are some entities that must always be figure according to the ground which they are related to but there are others that are about the same size and prominence which may switch between figure and ground. This phenomenon is called reversal of figure and ground. For example, Figure 2 may be seen as white vase at one moment and as two black faces in profile the next moment. The same happens in spoken language when we refer to locations in a city when we refer to 'the post office is near my house' or 'my house is near the post office'. Here, the post office or my house could be either the figure or the ground for locating the figure entity (Radden and Dirven 2007).

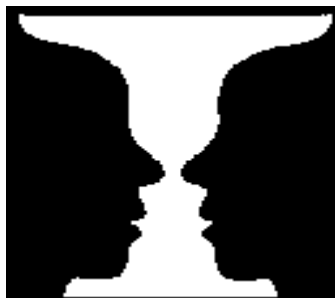


Figure n° 2: The face/vase

By looking at the shown examples, we can notice that the relationship between figure and ground can be seen in terms of locative relations which are given by prepositions; i.e., the meanings of locative prepositions can be understood as a figure-ground relationship (Ungerer and Schmid1996:160).

. There are specific manifestations of the more widely applicable notions of 'figure' and 'ground' which are 'trajector' and 'landmark.' These entities are pictorial representations used to represent location or movement creating what linguists call 'image schemas,' or simple and basic cognitive structures which are derived from

our everyday interaction with the world (Ungerer and Schmid 1996:160) where the trajector is the figure and the landmark is the ground.

If we look at Figure 3, we identify the plane as the figure and the hills as the ground. Both are now represented by symbols. The reason is that the image schema applies also to other entities different from planes and hills (e.g. ‘The cat is walking over the roof’).

The symbol for the figure (the circle) appears several times to indicate that what is represented is a process, something that has a dynamic quality. Each circle stands for a different temporal stage of this process. Moving from stage to stage the figure follows a path. (Ungerer and Schmid 1996:161)

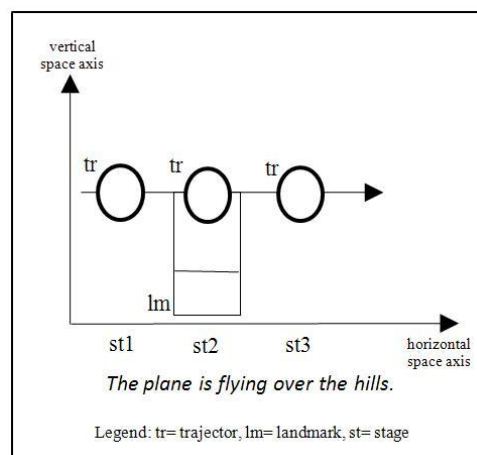


Figure n° 3: Representation of the image schema —OVER—

Similar to Brugman (1981) and Lakoff (1987) in Ungerer and Schmid (1996), also agree that there are central schemas for prepositions ‘over’, ‘out’ and ‘up’.

They also agree that there are cases where the landmark is unspecified as in the sentences such as in ‘the girl went out’ and ‘the prices are going up’.

As we can observe, there are some characteristics shared by the central schemas of the three prepositions identified by a trajector that moves along a path and is related to a landmark. This description seems to be sufficient but quite general. If we need to be more specific in terms of meanings or uses, we have to consider the variations which trajector, path and landmark can undergo. Such variants which only specify certain components of a schema, but do not diverge from its general configuration, are called ‘elaborations’ (Ungerer and Schmid 1996:164).

In the previous examples, we were looking at sentences where the prepositions referred to locations and movement. When we refer to locations and the prepositions regard as static, we might be facing a schematic representation as depicted in Figure 4.

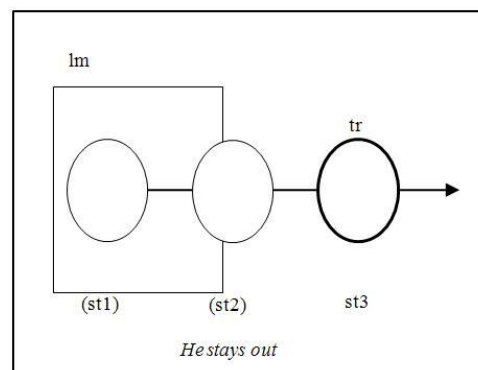


Figure n°4: Schematic representation of superficially static use of the—OUT—schema

All of the above introduced the figure and ground, trajector and landmark theory in terms of locative relations rendered by prepositions. If this distinction could only be used to explain those relations, its importance would be limited. Next,

by means of introducing two metaphors, I intend to explain how the figure/ground distinction is applicable to traditional grammar.

Traditional grammarians hold that simple clauses normally consist of a subject, a verb or predicate and a complement (object or adverbial). The subject refers to people, things, places (as well as complements) or they are 'empty'. In some cases subject and object can be exchanged, as in the figure/ground distinction described in the face/vase illusion. If we contrast these approaches with the ones developed by Langacker (1990a, 1991: chs 7, 8 in Ungerer and Schmid 1996), he suggests that a unified explanation of this syntactic diversity is possible if one understands the subject—verb—complement pattern as a reflection of the general cognitive principle of figure/ground segregation. . . . in a simple transitive clause the subject corresponds to the figure, the object to the ground, and the verb expresses the relationship between figure and ground. (Ungerer and Schmid 1996:172)

As in this section we are focusing on syntactic devices, we will use the terms 'syntactic figure' and 'syntactic ground' respectively. Langacker's favourite terms are 'clausal trajector' and 'clausal landmark' among other terms that he uses.

The level of prominence is of real importance when establishing the roles of subject and complement of a clause since they will make the distinction between figure and ground, trajector and landmark. Similarly, role archetypes here play an essential function since they will provide the bases to make the distinction between figure and ground in grammatical relations.

The two metaphors which refer to grammatical relations in terms of figure and ground distinction are the action chain, energy flow and the billiard-ball metaphor, where the former is as simple as an interaction of two entities where one entity is charged with energy, being the source of energy. This entity contacts a second entity and charges it with energy and the energy is transmitted and consumed by the second entity.

5.2. Related research

Muñoz (2003), in his research called *Esquemas locativos preposicionales: configuración de semántica de las preposiciones in, on, at del inglés y en del español.*, works with corpus in English and Spanish taken from the web. In his study, he compares the semantic configuration of prepositions **in**, **on** and **at** in English and **en** in Spanish.

After doing the analysis, Muñoz (2003), suggests a quantitative summary of the frequency of the use of the prepositions, presenting the following configurations:

- In for inside

The figure is an object which is inside the limits defined by the characteristics of the ground. At this stage, four configurations could be recognized as 'place'.

- Inside 1: Container

The ground entity is three-dimensional and limits any movement of the figure (if it moves). For example, *She is **in** prison.*

There are other less prototypical examples which are less complete, where we find some cases as, *that night Jessie made a fire **in** the fireplace.*

An interesting case, which is also taken into account, is the fact that in English, pieces of clothing are considered entities that contain people, so they fit into this category with examples as *She could imagine men **in** tuxedos.* (Examples from Muñoz, 2003)

- Inside 2: Partial container

The ground is also three-dimensional. At this time, the limitation of movement of the figure is less than in the previous

category and the ground appears to be surrounding the figure more than containing it. As in the following example, *My best friend didn't die **in** my arms, or anything.* (Example from Muñoz, 2003)

- Inside 3: Surface

In this case, the ground entity is not three-dimensional. It just presents width and length. Its limits are not specific and clear. Sometimes, three-dimensional entities could be used as surfaces but as two-dimensional entities. For example, *I was **in** the US yesterday.* (Example from Muñoz, 2003)

- Inside 4: Immersion

In this case, the ground entity does not present limits as container and does not present obstacles for the movement of the figure. These instances refer to the limits established from substances contained in irregular geometrical spaces which surround the figure. These cases could be near the metaphor since the ground is not specifically physical. For example, *There is certainly too much pepper **in** that soup.* (Example from Muñoz, 2003)

- On for Support

For this description, Muñoz (2003), validates Navarro i Ferrando 's proposal (1998), where it is established the existence of an essential sense called 'support', defined as the spatial relation between an entity which weight lays over a part of a surface of other entity. From this ideal situation, it was possible to confirm the existence of at least three possible extensions in the prototypical configuration of the senses of this preposition.

- Support 1: Support

The prototypical semantic configuration of the support notion involves three crucial elements. First, the entity that acts as figure is mobile and rests making contact with its base on the external surface of other object. Second, the entity that acts as ground, when is not the floor, offers prototypically a horizontal surface for the support of the figure. Finally, the positional axis is vertical. One example of this is the following: *He left his most important notes sitting right **on** his desk.* (Example from Muñoz, 2003)

- Support 2: Contact

There is the possibility to focus on the contact that should exist between the support surface of the figure and the base of the ground. The ideal case, this time, would be the possibility of having an object making contact with other object through the surfaces made for this purpose. At this point, the axial position is not important, but the geometrical characteristics remain being necessary for the relation. Let's check the following examples to clarify the configuration:

1. *The only decoration was a painting of a sad clown **on** muted blue wall.*
2. *...there was a picture **on** Elaine's side of the mirror.*

(Examples from Muñoz, 2003)

- Support 3: Movement towards the support or towards the contact

In this case, there is existence of movement and the gravitational axis is vertical. For example, *Jessie placed his tee **on** the ground.* (Example from Muñoz, 2003)

- At for immobility

Three basic characteristics can be recognized for this preposition. First, the ground is specific. Second, the figure does not move. Finally, preposition **at** seems to work in the cases where the ground is an entity unable to move. The possible variants of this configuration are the following:

- Immobility 1: Total immobility

This is the prototypical configuration, there is no mobility of the entities as in *They were **at** their usual table.* (Example from Muñoz, 2003)

- Immobility 2: Stopping

In this configuration, a determined movement comes to its end. This movement follows a determined trajectory according to the characteristics of the mobile object involved. For example, *...and [the car] stopped **at** the red light.* (Example from Muñoz, 2003)

- Immobility 3: Attack

This configuration is maybe the most productive. In this case, the immobility of the ground object is emphasized and the figure object is a mobile which goes directly to the indicated point in the ground with purpose of establishing a contact which will stop the movement with

diverse degrees of violence as in the following example: *She wanted to throw a glass **at** the wall.* (Example from Muñoz, 2003)

There are other examples found with the preposition **at** which do not fit into any of the categories and the author considered important to highlight because they could have a metaphorical visual mobility. They are examples as:

1. *He looked up **at** her...*
2. *He glanced **at** Laurie and continued.*

(Examples from Muñoz, 2003)

- En for all of the above

This preposition in Spanish is used for all the cases in described in English and examples of each configuration were found with the preposition in Spanish. So it will work as a container, partial container, surface, immersion, support, contact, immobility, stopping, and attack.

5.3. Conventional illustrations of prepositions

It is important also to consider a conventional meaning for the prepositions of location that is why I decided to design the following illustrations to portray the meaning of them. The circle represents the figure and the square represents the ground; in the case of the preposition **at**, there is an arch representing the ground.

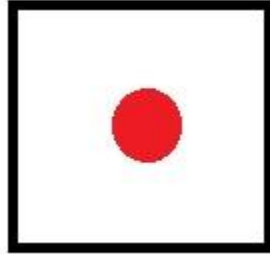


Illustration n° 1: Preposition **in**

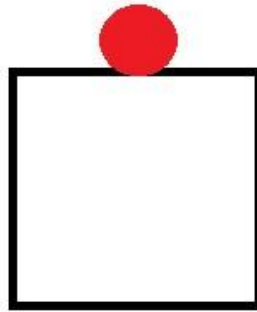


Illustration n° 2: Preposition **on**

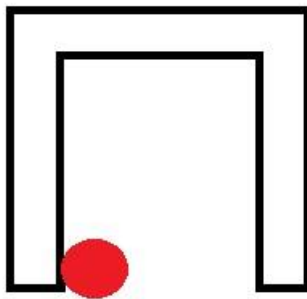


Illustration n° 3: Preposition **at**



Illustration n° 4: Preposition **to**

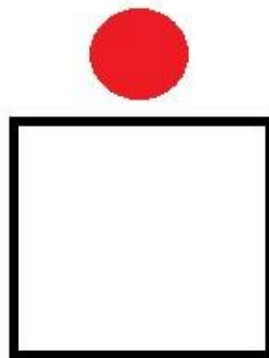


Illustration n° 5: Preposition **over**

6. Methodology

This study benefited from a qualitative, cross-sectional, descriptive, and inductive approach to analyze data as described in the data analysis procedure. As a requirement of a qualitative approach to analysis of data, this study did not utilize experimental and control groups.

6.1. Sample

The sample used in this study was written text produced by English speakers from different countries.

6.1.1. Selection of corpus

The samples were taken from the section 'letters from' from the weekly online version of a British newspaper called 'The Guardian'. Twelve letters were used for this study. The total number of words in all four letters is 5.372. The twelve letters were written originally in English and all of them contain about 450 words. There are two qualitative studies made by Ewa Dąbrowska (2009) where similar corpus length have been utilised for the purpose of the analysis. Additionally, I consider that the total number of words gave me enough descriptive power for a deep study.

6.1.2. Data collection

There is a section on the online newspaper, The Guardian, called 'Letters', a weekly edition consisting of letters sent by people from different countries. In this 'letters', ordinary people retell their experiences about various topics of interests, typically treating current cultural, social, and political issues. For this research study just one online newspaper was chosen since it gave appropriate data for the analysis. Letter sections from other newspapers are different in format, style, and size, so it could negatively influence the analysis. The idea of this qualitative

analysis is not to use different sources to have an unbiased sample but rather to have a homogenous sample to be more descriptive about a single case.

These letters were read and analyzed in order to obtain the necessary results to draw the conclusions which demonstrated the validity of the theories presented in the theoretical framework early suggested by Lakoff (1987) and Langacker (1990).

Next, there is an example of a letter that was analyzed. The following table summarizes the information of each letter by giving an overview of what will be found to start the analysis, presenting the title, publication date, number of words that they contain and the amount of sentences found to be analyzed.

Example of Letter 1

Title: Sri Lanka: saved by the bell

Sub-title: In Jaffna, you don't go to the supermarket. Vendors cycle to you, and they all have their own ring tones

Photograph description: Stop me and buy one ... a Sri Lankan fruit vendor sells king coconuts from his bicycle. Photograph: Ishara Kodikara/AFP

Body of the letter: In a world of internet shopping, shopping in Jaffna comes as a pleasant surprise; they do things a little differently here. The first tinkle of a bicycle bell can be heard at about 5.30am – the milkman on his bike, dispensing milk from an old metal churn into housewives' recycled bottles and jars. This discreet little tinkle is followed by the very much less discreet, irritating tune of the bread van. Dah da dah, dah da dah, dah da da dah. And again. And again. You wonder how much bread can possibly be needed on one small street.

A bit later, when you have just shaken off the tune of the bread van, a different, louder and even more persistent jingle: the ice-cream van. Competing with the

bread van, the vendor has cranked up the volume and added bass. It's the Tom Jones of the van vendors: the funky beat promising sexy, irresistible ice-cream.

After all this aural stimulation, the apologetic tinkle of the fishmonger on his wiry old bike is a relief. The housewives swarm around, elbowing their neighbours out of the way to secure the best fish at the best price. The scales are brought out and the process of weighing and bargaining, adjusting and re-negotiating, begins. The fishmonger is followed by his friend the veg vendor, with his old wooden cart, selling fresh vegetables to accompany the fish, and papaya for dessert.

Throughout the day, a straggle of old men on old bikes pass by, offering services and goods – bicycle repairs, newspapers, soft drinks – each with a subtly different ring. My bell identification skills are elementary, but my neighbours are experts, scurrying out of the house only for specific rings. Then it's time to pick up the pace for the evening round. Bread, ice cream (again?), fish, vegetables, lottery tickets. Usually the vans stagger their visits, but sometimes they converge, resulting in competing tunes and frantic housewives.

In the brief lulls between musical retail activity the local temple starts up. There's always a festival: there are so many gods and all of them seem to demand noise. My sister phoned. What's all that noise, she said. Which one, I asked, the bread van, ice-cream van, fish man, temple, crows?

It's noisy, the tunes are irritating, but I wouldn't have it any other way. Internet shopping? No thanks, where's the fun in that?

Letter n°	Title	Publication date	N° of words	N° of sentences
1	Sri Lanka: saved by the bell	January 3 rd , 2012	440	10
2	Letter from Indonesia: Meals on wheels	June 26 th , 2012	459	12
3	Burkina Faso: Local road protest heard across the airwaves	August 9 th , 2011	466	18
4	Rwanda: Family divided on leaving valley home	July 5 th , 2011	408	12
5	Letter from India: the welcoming lights of Gangtok	October 23 rd , 2012	411	15
6	Letter from Nepal: Terai times	November 27 th , 2012	458	18
7	Letter from Malaysia: flavour and colour	September 25 th , 2012	402	13
8	Letter from China: street food	September 11 th , 2011	605	16
9	Letter from New Zealand: pyjama party	August 21 st , 2012	444	21
10	Letter from Nepal: old love story	August 7 th , 2012	409	16
11	Letter from Chile: blooming metropolis	May 8 th , 2012	424	12
12	Letter from China: Taste of home	January 17 th , 2012	446	19
Total number			5372	182

Table n° 1: Description of letters

6.1.3. Data analysis procedures

Each letter was analyzed separately at the beginning of the data analysis because they are all different in terms of topic. The sentences were numbered in order to avoid confusion when performing the analysis.

6.1.3.1. Stage 1

The constructions (phrases, clauses, sentences) containing the prepositions **in**, **on**, **at**, **to**, and **over** were separated and numbered.

6.1.3.2. Stage 2

The constructions which contained the mentioned prepositions and showed locative relations were taken to be analyzed, the others were dismissed since they were not useful for the purposes of this research.

6.1.3.3. Stage 3

The constructions containing prepositions showing locative relations were displayed in Table 2

Letter nº		
Construction nº	Construction	Preposition

Table nº 2: Stage 3 of analysis

6.1.3.4. Stage 4

After dissecting sentences into smaller parts of speech, information from table 2 was utilized to complete the information in table 3 as shown in the following:

Constructions		Structure				
n°	Phrase, Sentence	Clause,	Entity 1 (figure)	Predication	Preposition	Entity 2 (ground)

Table 3: Stage 4 of the analysis

This table gave us the necessary information to draw conclusions about prominence regarding figure and ground when analysing both, sentences with locative (prepositions) relations.

After completing the tables which helped to organize the information, the data was coded. Codes with similar patterns were aggregated to create themes for further analysis.

Once the entities (1) and (2) were recognized in every construction, came the grammatical part. Each component of the construction had to be recognized as a part of speech because they needed to fit into one of the categories of the analysis created for the purpose of this research, where I found people, things, animals, among others. For these purposes, the same tables were used in Ms Excel using filters on a spreadsheet.

7. Hypothesis

In locative relations, figure appears to be the most prominent entity. There are also some other cases where any of the entities can play a figure or a ground role. It is in that moment that we should apply the principle of perceptual prominence and the figure and the ground will depend on the focus of attention of the person who perceives the message.

Letters written in English by ordinary people are a useful source to obtain data to analyze corpus in order to demonstrate that the locative relations rendered by prepositions **in**, **on**, **at**, **to**, and **over** depict figure and ground in order to establish the prominence principle illustrated in the humans' mind.

Therefore, it is hypothesized that in my data I will find that humans tend to create a visual image in their minds, where an entity will always be more prominent (figure) from the context it is set (ground) and it is depicted in words by means of locative relations.

8. Analysis and Results

The aim of this section is to show the results and analyze the cases depicted in the data. As a first step to this analysis, categories have been created in order to classify the constructions.

The 12 letters were divided in constructions (sentences, clauses and phrases) that contained locative prepositions. As a first view, there were constructions where the prepositions could have appeared as showing locative relations but once the detailed analysis started, I realized that some of them had to be left out. The prepositions linking entities 1 and 2 in those constructions depicted other relations as expressions, phrasal verbs, fixed expressions, infinitive verb, and comparative relation, so sentences (9), (31), (76), (78), (83), (99), (109), (115), (117), (125), (126), (132), (147), (148), (152), (156), (169) and (171) were taken out of this analysis.

The following table shows the stage 4 of the analysis, where the constructions are dissected in order to start the analysis, the constructions had to be cut in order to fit the table on the sheet, in the appendixes they could be found complete.

Constructions		Structure			
nº	Phrase, Clause, Sentence	Entity 1 (figure)	Predication	Preposition	Entity 2 (ground)
1	In Jaffna, you don't go to...	You	don't go to the supermarket	in	Jaffna
2	In Jaffna, you don't go to...	You	don't go	to	the supermarket
3	Vendors cycle to you, and...	vendors	Cycle	to	you
4	In a world of internet...	Internet shopping		in	world
5	In a world of internet...	Internet shopping		in	Jaffna
6	The milkman on his bike...	The milkman	dispensing milk from...	on	bike

7	You wonder how much...	bread		on	street
8	After all this aural...	the fishmonger		on	bike
10	It's noisy, the tunes are...			in	that
11	Letter from Indonesia...	Meals		on	wheels
12	Food for the freight...	Food		in	Jakarta
13	Macet, as it is known...	Life		in	the city
14	As office-goers and other...	meals		on	wheels
15	In some streets, there is...	vendors		in	streets
16	In some streets, there is...	vendors		over	the sides of the road
17	Each vendor has a...	patrons	can walk	to	vendor
18	It wasn't easy for me at...	I	Dine	at	roadside
19	Satay, or grilled chicken...	Satay	is popular	over	the country
20	The preparation of this dish...	meat	Barbecued	over	fire
21	After a weary day at the...	Day		at	office
22	Some of the streets in...	streets		in	central Jakarta
23	Protesters in Djibo hope...	Protesters		in	Djibo
24	Protesters in Djibo hope...	demands		on	deaf ears
25	Protesters in Djibo hope...	demands		in	Ougadougou
26	About 5 km south of the...	bumper		to	Bumper
27	On a narrow bridge...	a massive tree trunk	Lies	on	a narrow bridge
28	On a narrow bridge...	banner	Nailed	to	the trunk
29	On the Djibo side of the...	a huge marquee	Straddles	on	the Djibo side of the roadblock
30	The boy closest to the ...	the boy	(closest)	to	the music
32	A tall boy wearing a ...	He	Gestures	to	rapper boy
33	"Six years ago the ...	the president	Came	to	Djibo
34	"He saw that our road is ...	the way		to	Ougadougou

35	Shopkeepers loll on ...	Shopkeepers	Loll	on	Motorbikes
36	Knots of older men sit in ...	knots of older men	Sit	in	the shade of acacia trees
37	Young women sashay ...	plates of mangoes and yams		on	their heads
38	"We're on the news! ...	We	Are	on	the news
39	"We're on the news!..."	little town	talked about	in	Paris
40	When, indeed? And if the ...	the echoes of Djibo's grief	can resound	in	Versailles
41	Rwanda: Family divided on ...	Family	Divides	on	leaving valley home
42	A source of income in Rwanda...	coffee beans	(are) a source of income	in	Rwanda
43	My Kinyarwanda teacher...	My teacher's parents	Live	in	a remote part of...
44	Theo waved to everyone...	Theo	Waved	to	Everyone
45	I was introduced to several...	I	was introduced	to	several smallholders
46	I was introduced to several...	Theo	Pointed	to	a house
47	Tharcissie makes the most ...	co-operative		in	Kigali
48	They are by no means the...	people		in	the valley
49	Theo disappeared, leaving ...	myself		in	Kinyarwanda
50	We chatted about farming...	farmers		to	the top of the hill
51	Etienne worries about not ...	Etienne	worries about not being close	to	his coffee plants
52	Etienne worries about not...	Etienne	Isolated	in	the valley
53	A long drive from plains to ...	plains		to	Mountain
54	A long drive from plains to...	jewel	Hidden	in	the Himalayas
55	Tranquil retreat ... an Indian...	the prayer wheels	(are rotated)	at	a monastery
56	Tranquil retreat ... an Indian...	a monastery		in	Gangtok
57	In the distance, the warm...	lights		in	the distance
58	We have crossed ...	monasteries, temples and bridges...		on	our way up

59	We have crossed ...	our way up	Driving	over	rough Himalayan terrain
60	We have crossed...	rough Himalayan terrain		in	our journey
61	We have crossed...	our journey		to	the mountains
62	Clear springs and hamlets pop...	the consumerist trappings...	are kept	at	3,000 metres above sea level
63	After hours of travel up ...	We	find ourselves	in	Gangtok
64	You can almost conjure up ...	hill roads		on	their horses
65	Today, the main ...	It	is lined by restaurants...	in	movie theatre
66	It is close to 8pm, and a ...	a cloudy mist	Descends	over	the town
67	Up in its quiet Himalayan ...	a rich happy life	lives up	in	its quiet Himalayan corner
68	On the plains beneath the ...	Life	has an enduring, timeless quality	on	the plains beneath the Himalayas
69	Warm work ... harvesting ...	Rice		in	the Terai region of Nepal
70	Our jeep bucks and sways as...	We	make our way out	to	the villages
71	Our jeep bucks and sways as...	our last day		on	the Terai
72	It's 35C in the shade and a...	35C		in	the shade
73	It dances in the air like a pale...	It	Dances	in	the air
74	Soft grains coat my fingers....	Nepal	Is	on	my skin
75	Dropati Devi, a rural health...	Dropati Devi	born and rised	in	in this community
77	We exchange a'salaams...	I	am swept into her house	on	a tide of giggling children
79	Just as I manage to grab this...	I	return it	to	the bowl
80	Just as I manage to grab this...	its cellmate	Is	over	the side and away
81	She serves sweet spicy chai...	Chai		in	small glasses
82	I look beyond the courtyard...	I	Look	to	where a girl in a crimson...
84	On the horizon a bullok cart...	a bullok cart	Shimmers	on	the horizon

85	On the horizon a bullok cart...	a bullok cart	Shimmers	in	the horizon
86	A vendor counts money at a...	a vendor	counts money	at	a vegetable market
87	A vendor counts money at a...	a vegetable market		in	Kuala Lumpur
88	Visitors immediately notice...	assault		on	the senses
89	Pink pavements, beautifully...	You	Are	in	the right place
90	Follow your nose to flower...	your nose		to	flower sellers filling a...
91	Follow your nose to flower...	your stomach		to	the restaurants and hawker...
92	Although a few tourists...	the shops	Sell	to	the local community
93	Although a few tourists...	the incense		in	the air
94	You can eat chicken...	Rice		to	a banana leaf
95	You can eat chicken...	chicken tandoori	piling	on	daal vegetables
96	You can eat chicken...	vegetables	Cooked	in	countless flavours
97	Tables and seats are...	guarantees	of substance	over	Style
98	After the heat, colour and ...	visitors	Retreat	to	the relative
100	A hearty appetite is a must ...	the street snacks		in	Xi'an's Muslim Quarter
101	Comforting ... people eat ...	people	eat Laba porridge	in	in Xi'an, Shaanxi...
102	Evenings in Xi'an's Muslim...	Evenings		in	Xi'an's Muslim Quarter
103	Summer breakfasts in the ...	Summer breakfasts		in	the Muslim Quarter
104	This overlap between...	They	Shout	to	passing customers
105	The same dishes are ...	dishes	(are) adapted	to	local preferences
106	In Xi'an's Muslim Quarter...	small white pots of condiments	adorn every table	in	Xi'an's Muslim Quarter
107	Here, a bowl of doufunao ...	soy beans and pickled vegetables	Swimming	in	a hot, sour sauce
108	It is prepared on an old ...	It	is prepared	on	an old smoke-blackened...

110	The cook ladles pancake ...	The cook	sprinkles onions	over	the pancakes
111	Jianbing guozi is one of ...	satisfaction	(is added)	to	every bite
112	One dish that is truly ...	hulatang	is truly indigenous	to	this neighbourhood
113	It simmers in metre-high ...	It	Simmers	in	metre-high stainless steel drums
114	Hulatang is so thick and ...	Hulatang	is served	in	Bowls
116	Fashion leader ... a man ...	a limousine		in	Beijing
118	Even escalating rate bills ...	operations		in	nearby hills
119	The cause of the fury is the ...	wearing pyjamas		in	Public
120	The cause of the fury is the ...	the latest craze...	is the cause of fury	in	the supermarkets
121	The fashion has been ...	Men	(joining)	in	the fashion
122	Letters to the local paper...	letters		to	the local paper
123	In favour of parading their ...	nightwear		in	Public
124	In favour of parading their...	shoppers	plan to go back	to	Bed
127	Someone else argued that...	pyjamas		in	Public
128	Someone else argued that...	They	should go	to	Dubai or London
129	Another person fumed that...	people	dress nicely	in	Nepal
130	The district council is being ...	a ban		on	the wearing of pyjamas in public
131	The district council is being ...	pyjamas		in	Public
133	Has Gisborne, a ...?	Benchmark		in	Fashion
134	Imagine my surprise ...	the other morning		in	the city
135	Perhaps he was a visiting ...	shares		in	a fracking company
136	A visit to the town of ...	a visit		to	the town
137	An Indian physically ...	The Ramayana		in	Bangalore, India
138	I was in Janakpur to collect ...	I	Was	in	Janakpur
139	Maithili women are ...	people		in	the Terai plains of east Nepal

140	India's oldest love story ...	India's oldest love story	Began	in	Janakpur
141	Their story is told in the ...	Their story	is told	in	The Ramayana
142	Next door to its elegant ...	a hideous modern building	is next door	to	its elegant stucco façade
143	The artists work sitting ...	The artists	work sitting	on	the floor
144	The artists work sitting ...	The artists	Paint	on	Nepali lokta paper
145	In Maithili culture it is ...	the women	Paint	in	Maithili culture
146	In Maithili culture it is ...	women	Paint	on	the freshly plastered mud walls...
149	I look at my painting. In the ...	artists		in	the folk style of Maithili
150	I look at my painting. In the ...	I	Look	at	my painting
151	The celestial lovers are here ...	Hanuman	Watches	over	the celestial lovers
153	A garden dedicated to ...	a fine vantage point		over	the colourful city of Valparaíso
154	Steady climb ... a funicular...	one of the steep hills		in	Valparaíso
155	Rubbish collects in the...	rubbish	Collects	in	in the gullies
157	One sunny Saturday...	the paintwork		on	the ground floors of buildings
158	Crumbling old townhouses...	Crumbling old houses		in	the World Heritage area
159	The link to Camogli is...	the link		to	Camogli
160	"I also wanted to make a...	a homage		to	Gabriela Mistral
161	She was a much better...	a focal point		in	the garden
162	She was a much better...	the Elqui valley		in	north Chile
163	But he smiles and returns...	he	smiles and returns	to	his garden
164	Daily bread: bakers making...	flatbread		in	Kashgar, Xinjiang, China
165	Nadira is putting the finishing...	Nadira	is putting touches	to	her plans
166	Nadira is putting the finishing...	getaway		to	China

167	We are on the hunt for bread.	We	Are	on	the hunt
168	Not just any old bread but...	expedition		to	China's eastern shores
170	Lies must not be told in the...	lies	must not be told	in	the presence of naan
172	Vows taken in the presence...	the common loaf-shaped bread	Sold	in	plastic wrappings
173	Naan is as close to a ...	Naan	is close	to	Uighur's heart
174	We slither up to the limits...	We	slither uo	to	the limits of the city
175	We pass, in my mind, several...	several naan sellers	Passes	in	my mind
176	We pass, in my mind, several...	several naan sellers		on	our way
177	We close in on our objective.	we	close in	on	our objective
178	We finally skid to a halt.	we	finally skid	to	a halt
179	Neither of us has actually...	nuggets		in	a corner
180	Not daring to criticise naan in ...	naan		in	Public
181	Not daring to criticise naan in...	we	had come back	to	the city
182	Passing my local baker on the...	my local baker		on	the way home

Table 3: Stage 4 of the analysis

The prepositions **in**, **on**, **at**, **to**, and **over** are the central components of the categories where people are labelled as 'someone', things as 'something' and places as 'somewhere', these entities sometimes act as figure and sometimes as ground. While preparing the information for the analysis, some constructions had to be taken out because the prepositions were part of phrasal verbs or were the initial part of infinitive verb phrases.

In some cases where prepositions **in**, **on** and **at** depict locative relations, I find necessary to add information about the theory given by Muñoz (2003),

because it is relevant to demonstrate the function of the ground and how the prepositions behave in those cases.

Construction (22) 'Some of the streets in central Jakarta even have vendors serving delicacies from different islands of the country' is an example taken from the data collected. The section that we need for the analysis is 'Some of the streets **in** central Jakarta' because it is the construction where we can find a locative relation rendered by a preposition, in this case, preposition **in**. then we need to recognize the entities and classify them in terms of figure (entity 1) and ground (entity 2). The bigger entity (ground) is the one where the smaller (figure) is set, so we need to decide the size of the entities according to the locative preposition and the prominence of the entities. In this construction, the more prominent entity is 'Some of the streets', so it will carry the figure function contained by 'central Jakarta', the ground.

In order to start the analysis, 11 categories were created to make the range of data smaller. Some of the 11 categories in which this analysis will be based on fit for more than one preposition and others fit for just one. In some cases a category has been created for one construction to be analyzed. The categories are the following:

Categories of constructions
1. A point in the time somewhere
2. A situation somewhere
3. People/facts in a group
4. Someone someone
5. Someone in a manner of performance
6. Someone something
7. Someone somewhere
8. Something something
9. Something somewhere
10. Somewhere something
11. Somewhere somewhere

Table n° 4: Categories of constructions

8.1. A point in the time somewhere

In this category, two examples were found and I decided to live it as the category calls it because I prefer to treat entity 1 as 'a point in time' and not as 'something' because it could be any other entity referring to a point in time.

One example found in the text is construction (134) 'Imagine my surprise therefore when, the other morning in the city I saw a man wearing a dark grey, bespoke suit, a silk tie and black polished Oxfords.' Where entity 1 'the other

morning', cannot be treated as a thing because is intangible and is a point in time. The preposition **in** locates 'morning' **in** 'the city' (entity 2), showing the prominence in that point of the day, not at night or midnight.

According to the theory presented by Muñoz (2003), preposition **in** is indicating that the ground is two-dimensional, in this case 'the city' is acting as a surface ground where the figure is located.

The other example found in the text is construction (71) 'Our jeep bucks and sways as we make our way out to the villages where we'll spend our last day on the Terai.' Where the locative preposition **on** links a point in time 'our last day' with 'the Terai'. Locative relations are shown by prepositions and in this case the preposition **on** locates 'ourselves in our last day **on** the Terai'. Where 'the Terai' is supporting 'our last day', acting the former as the ground for the latter figure and couldn't be acting the opposite way.

8.2. A situation somewhere

A situation is neither a thing, nor a place, or a person, that is the reason why I decided to leave this category as describing just a situation located somewhere and just one example taken from the texts fit into this category.

An example found in the text is construction (120) 'The cause of the fury is the latest craze for wearing pyjamas in public, especially noticeable in the supermarkets' where a situation happens in a certain place. 'The latest craze for wearing pyjamas in public'—the situation—'in the supermarkets—the place—the prominent entity in this case is the fact of wearing pyjamas in public, so I consider that the situation is the figure for the ground depicted by the place 'the supermarkets', which are linked by the preposition **in**, allowing the place to act as a container.

According to Muñoz (2003), a supermarket should be considered a container, being a first order entity which limits the movements of the figure. In this case, the

situation of 'wearing pyjamas in public' is being contained by the supermarket and its movement is being limited by the geometrical characteristics of the 'supermarket', the container entity, which is of kind 3, surface.

8.3. People/facts in a group

This category will carry all the examples where the role of the ground will be played by entities that have characteristics of groups as beliefs, ideas, expressions, community conventions, or similar manners of performance. As the preposition found in these examples is **in**, the ground found in every example will act as container. According to the theory presented by Muñoz (2003), each of the containers presented in the following examples will belong to a different configuration.

The first example found in the text is construction (145) 'In Maithili culture it is only the women who paint; on the freshly plastered mud walls of their houses, they celebrate marriages, births or Hindu festivals such as Deepawali'. Culture is an abstract entity that usually contains traditions, people, food, among other tangible and intangible entities. In this case, the preposition **in** is linking two entities being 'the women' the most relevant one (figure) in relation to 'Maithili culture', which is the ground and acts as a container of the prominent entity. This container presents no limits and no obstacles for the movement of the figure, the characteristics presented correspond to the ones described for inside 4: immersion (Muñoz, 2003).

The second example is construction (119) 'The cause of the fury is the latest craze for wearing pyjamas in public, especially noticeable in the supermarkets'. Entity 1 is the fact of 'wearing pyjamas' which is linked to entity 2—'public'—by means of the locative preposition **in**, where 'public' as well as 'culture' in the previous example, plays a role of container of entity 1. So the prominence principle in this example agrees with the figure-ground theory, being entity 1—figure—more prominent than entity 2—ground. The object 'public' in this example, is playing the

role of a group of people and the fact of ‘wearing pyjamas’ is being contained by the crowd. According to Muñoz (2003), this container is also kind 4: immersion, because it has no limits and do not present obstacles for the movement of entity 1.

The next example found in the text is construction (133) ‘Has Gisborne, a geographically remote city, set a new benchmark in fashion?’. The entities are recognized as ‘benchmark’ and ‘fashion’; entity 1, ‘benchmark’, is playing the role of figure since it is a prominent fact inside ‘fashion’ (entity 2). The decision of determining which entity would play the role of entities 1 and 2 was taken for the following reason: ‘fashion’ in this construction is acting as a bigger category containing a new ‘benchmark’ because it (fashion) is considered as a manner of performance established or agreed by a group of people, so it is the ‘benchmark’ the prominent entity inside the ‘fashion’. Preposition **in** is acting as a locative link between the two entities involved in the construction. According to Muñoz (2003), fashion should act as a container of kind 4: immersion because of its characteristics. I consider that ‘fashion’ is an abstract entity that corresponds to the metaphorical features described to fit into this category.

The other example is construction (75) ‘Dropati Devi, a rural health facilitator born and raised in this community, crosses the courtyard, her feet kicking up dust from the dung floor’ depicts the other locative relation rendered by preposition **in** when linking people with somewhere. In this construction, entity 1 is represented by ‘Dropa Devi’, the figure that was born and raised **in** ‘this community’—entity 2. The noun community represents a larger entity related to people or a group of people, in this example entity 1 is contained by entity 2, depicting the figure and the ground as expected. I would consider this container of kind 4, immersion because its nature is metaphorical; it presents no limits and no obstacles for the movement of the figure.

8.4. Someone someone

From the data collected, I found two prepositions that can be used to link these entities which are **to** and **over**. Locative relations in terms of prominence depicted by these two prepositions are very important in this case because the preposition will give information about the prominent entity. If we look at the constructions taken from the texts, we notice that the entities have the same level of importance in terms of meaning and in terms of geometrical structure they may look similar and sometimes the same. It is here where the preposition plays an important role because it will give us a guide on what the prominent entity is.

I will take two examples to explain how this locative relation works in terms of prominence.

The first example taken from the text is construction (3) 'Vendors cycle to you, and they all have their own ring tones'.

The second example taken from the text is construction (151) 'The celestial lovers are here as well, eating a cob of corn while Hanuman watches discreetly over them'.

In these two constructions, a person or people are the entities 1 and 2, (3) 'Vendors' **to** 'you' and (151) 'Hanuman' **over** 'the celestial lovers'. If we pay attention, every entity can perform the action but the focus will be marked by the prepositions and the figure and ground are important in terms of prominence. I can say 'you' cycle **to** 'vendors' or 'The celestial lovers' watch **over** 'Hanuman' but the meaning and the focus of the constructions changes. These prepositions show movement and entities 1 and 2 are able to move in any direction, that is why the possibility of being in one side or the other exists and the role of the entities could change according to the point of view of the reader/narrator.

More evidence may be necessary to see other point in here, let's check other examples found with the preposition **to** and see if we can make other argument about the verb used with this locative preposition.

In construction (17) 'Each vendor has a designated spot, so the patrons can walk to their favourite ones without getting lost'. I recognized 'patrons' as the figure and 'vendor' as the ground, the locative preposition is **to** which is related to the verb 'walk'.

In construction (32) 'A tall boy wearing a baseball cap grabs one of the microphones and turns it on. He gestures to rapper boy to turn the music down'. I recognized 'he' as entity1 (the figure) and 'boy' as entity 2 (the ground), the locative preposition is also **to** which again is related to the verb 'gesture'.

In construction (44) 'Theo waved to everyone tending their crops and they responded with amakuru toto (how are you, young one)—his childhood nickname'. I recognized 'Theo' as the figure and 'everyone' as the ground, the locative relation is rendered by preposition **to** which is related to the verb 'wave'.

In construction (45) 'I was introduced to several smallholders, most of whom seemed to be aunties and uncles of some kind, then Theo pointed to a house below us. We had arrived'. The figure is 'I' and the ground is 'smallholders', again the locative relation is depicted by the preposition **to** which is directly related to the verb 'introduce'.

In construction (104) 'This overlap between businesses is encouraged by the restaurant owners, who seem to be complementing each other, rather than competing, as they shout the names of their specialties to passing customers'. The entity recognized as the figure is 'They', the ground is 'customers' and the locative relation is also rendered by the preposition **to** which is again related to the verb that in this case is 'shout'.

If we look at the last constructions, from (17) to (104), it can be observed that there is a relation between the verbs and the preposition **to**. These verbs indicate a movement from one entity in direction **to** another, in these cases, people.

8.5. Someone in a manner of performance

In this prominence case it is easy to identify how the locative relations rendered by the preposition **in** acts. A manner of performance is used as a container for the figures of these constructions.

The first example taken from the text is construction (121) 'The fashion has been initiated by women but bets are on as to how long it will be before men sew up their flies and join in'. The figure 'men', rendered by preposition **in** in the ground 'fashion' forms part of it and the ground is a container of the figure, keeping the prominence of entity 1 as figure inside the ground that contains it. As it was mentioned before and according to Muñoz (2003), the container at this time is of kind 4: immersion, because its limits are not defined and the figure does not have limits to move inside of it.

Another example found in the text is construction (149) 'I look at my painting. In the folk style of Maithili artists, Gangawati has painted all the birds around her home: tiny screech owls, a crested hoopoe, a colourful openbill stork and a dazzling blue peacock'. The same happens with the entity 2 'style' in this construction, where it contains entity 1, the 'artists', being the prominent issue of the construction. The locative relation is also rendered by preposition **in** and 'style' is the container of 'artists'. We are again in the presence of a kind 4 of container, immersion, with no limits and obstacles, where the figure moves freely.

8.6. Someone something

Examples for prepositions **in**, **on**, **at** and **to** were found in the texts where a person plays the role of entity 1 and things play the role of entity 2.

For preposition **in**, the people 'naan sellers' are contained by 'my mind', in this case entity 2 is an abstract container. Construction (175) 'We pass, in my mind, several perfectly good naan sellers on our way, but Nadira is unwavering', shows a locative relation where 'my mind' is the ground for figure 'naan sellers', once more, the prominent entity is the one contained by the ground. Again the container seems to be of kind 4: immersion, limitless and without obstacles for the figure to move, 'my mind' seems to be metaphorical entity that fits into the description of this kind of container.

More constructions apply for this category when using preposition **on**, since people could place themselves **on** means of transportation, means of communication, places, movements, objects, or events. Examples for this preposition are the following sentences:

Construction (6) 'The milkman on his bike, dispensing milk from an old metal churn into housewives' recycled bottles and jars'.

Construction (38) 'We're on the news! Radio France Internationale is talking about the Djibo road demonstration. When has our little town ever been talked about in Paris?'

Construction (77) 'We exchange a'salaams then she motions me to follow her, and I'm swept into her house on a tide of giggling children'.

Construction (146) 'In Maithili culture it is only the women who paint; on the freshly plastered mud walls of their houses, they celebrate marriages, births or Hindu festivals such as Deepawali'.

Construction (167) 'We are on the hunt for bread'.

In construction (6), 'the milkman' is the figure and 'bike' is the ground, their geometric characteristics do not allow the bike being on the milkman, in this case

the locative preposition denotes ‘the milkman’ as the prominent entity, the focus is on the person being on the means of transportation.

In construction (38), people being on the news shows a locative relation rendered by the preposition **on** where the prominent entity is ‘we’, being **on** the ground ‘news’ which is a means of communication, the focus of this construction is ‘we’, the people being **on** the ‘news’.

In construction (77), ‘I’ is set on a ‘tide of children’ where the focus is on ‘I’—the figure—being ‘tide of children’ the ground, which plays the role of a locative location

A person can also be located **on** objects and events as the case of construction (146), where ‘women’, the prominent entity, which is also the figure, perform the action of painting **on** ‘walls’, the ground. And construction (167) where ‘we’ is the figure and ‘our objective’ is the ground.

According to Muñoz (2003), preposition **on**, is playing two roles in these constructions, in construction (6), the ‘bike’ is supporting ‘the milkman’ and in construction (77), there is a movement towards the support or towards the contact between ‘I’ **on** a ‘tide of children’.

There is only one construction where the preposition **at** represents a locative relation in terms of people **at** an object. In construction (150) ‘I look at my painting. In the folk style of Maithili artists, Gangawati has painted all the birds around her home: tiny screech owls, a crested hoopoe, a colourful openbill stork and a dazzling blue peacock’, the preposition in this case is directly related to the verb ‘look’. In this construction, ‘I’ is located looking **at** ‘my painting’, where ‘I’ plays the role of figure and ‘my painting’ as ground. According to Muñoz (2003), this example would fit into the category that he did not analyze because of its metaphorical nature. From my point of view, I consider that the metaphorical visual mobility that he refers to involves a verb, which is ‘look’, and the fact of being able to perform

the action of looking is giving the actor the possibility of representing the immobility that the preposition **at** is intending to depict.

Preposition **to** was found in two cases when referring to 'people **to** something'. People may perform an action **to** objects or places as in the following examples:

Construction (124) 'In favour of parading their nightwear in public are shoppers who plan to go back to bed as soon as the supermarket shop is done, and others who say they can't afford dry cleaning so they live in their night clothes'.

Construction (178) 'We finally skid to a halt'.

In the first example, the clause to be analyzed is 'shoppers who plan to go back to bed'. Here we can find the two elements of the locative relations that we are looking for in this research, entity 1 is 'shoppers' and entity 2 is 'bed'. The locative relation rendered by the preposition **to** shows that the figure is shoppers and the ground is bed.

In construction (178), the preposition links people **to** an object that plays the role of a place, so the locative relation is easily recognizable. Here entity 1 is a moving subject that performs an action *going to* 'a halt', being entity 1 the figure (or trajector) that moves to get to the ground—a halt.

8.7. Someone somewhere

This category was found in constructions which contain all the prepositions studied in this research **in**, **on**, **at**, **to** and **over**. The main entities that represent location where people perform an action are places, group of people and abstract locations (play the role of places, but are not tangible).

The preposition **in** was found in two different kinds of constructions, where a person performs an action **in** a place and **in** a group of people. The places are represented by cities, countries or locations as streets and valleys, among others.

An example found in the text is construction (1) 'In Jaffna, you don't go to the supermarket', entity 1 is 'you' and entity 2 is 'Jaffna'. In this construction, the preposition indicates location of a person **in** a place (Jaffna—a city). In this example, the ground is bigger in terms of size and acts as a container of the person 'you' which acts as figure. According to Muñoz (2003), the kind of container is 3, surface, because it presents two-dimensional features (width and length), its limits are less discrete and normally defined by convention.

The other example found in the text is construction (138) 'I was in Janakpur to collect a painting by Gangawati Das, a 45-year-old Maithili woman who works in the Janakpur Women's Development Centre, an organization set up in 1989 to promote the work of female artists'. As in the previous example, the ground will also be bigger than the figure. The entities recognized in this construction are 'I', the figure, and 'Janakpur', the ground. The locative relation is rendered by the preposition **in** that locates 'I' in a place which acts as a surface container.

As can be noticed in the two previous examples, when we refer to places as cities, countries, or any location, we will refer to surface container because they present the required characteristics described by Muñoz (2003), their limits are discrete and present two-dimensional features.

Construction (41) 'Rwanda: Family divided on leaving valley home', is one of the clearest examples of locative relations since people on a place should just mark a locative location of the people. In this example, 'family' is the figure and 'valley' is the ground, being the focus 'family'—the prominent entity of the construction depicted by the preposition **on**.

The preposition **on** was found in other construction (176) 'We pass, in my mind, several perfectly good naan sellers on our way, but Nadira is unwavering', where it represents people being or performing an action **on** a 'way'. The subject of this sentence is setting this situation on his/her mind and the figure and ground relation can be perfectly recognized since entity 1 represented by 'naan sellers' can be set

on ‘our way’—entity 2—establishing a coherent locative relation where again in terms of size entity 2 is bigger than entity 1. According to Muñoz (2003), the support here is the kind of movement towards the support or towards the contact, since there is existence of movement that finishes in a situation of support.

Preposition **at** was found in two constructions where entity 1 is linked to places by means of the preposition. Constructions (18) ‘It wasn’t easy for me at the beginning to dine at the roadside, with smoke often enveloping the surroundings’ and (86) ‘A vendor counts money at a vegetable market in Kuala Lumpur’ are the examples taken from the letters. Entity 1 are ‘I’ and ‘a vendor’ and both play the role of figure in the ground represented by entity 2 ‘roadside’ and ‘vegetable market’. According to Muñoz (2003), in both examples, preposition **at** depicts total immobility, since the location of the figures in the grounds were already there when the action happened, it did not involve movement.

In the case of preposition **to**, the verbs used in the constructions represent movement, so the person performing the action is moving **to** a place when verbs are part of the constructions. If we look at the examples, we will notice that the figure-ground relation works perfectly and that a good description of what happens here is the trajector-landmark relation—where entity 1 is the moving object and entity 2 represents the landmark to which the trajector moves.

An example found in the text is construction (82) ‘I look beyond the courtyard across vivid paddy fields to where a girl in a crimson sari is a flame against the green’ is different according to the others because it does not contain a moving verb and entity 2 can be considered an abstract place because there is not physical place. Although ‘where a girl in a crimson sari is a flame against the green’ refers to a physical place and ‘the girl in a crimson sari’ should be in a physical place, the place is not depicted as a tangible place. The locative relation depicted by preposition **to** is easily recognizable and entity 1—‘I’—represents the figure and

entity 2—‘where a girl in a crimson sari is a flame against the green’—represents the ground.

In the case of the other constructions there is a figure-ground/trajector-landmark relation, the places are not abstract and the verbs used represent movement. In construction (2) ‘In Jaffna, you don't go to the supermarket’, entity 1 ‘you’ is linked to entity 2 ‘the supermarket’ by means of the locative preposition **to**, and the moving verb is ‘go’.

Locative preposition **over** was found in one construction (16) ‘In some streets, there is any array of vendors sprawled all over the sides of the road’. Here, preposition **over** locates entity 1 ‘vendors’ related to entity 2 ‘the sides of the road’. In this case, the verb is representing a state and helps the preposition locating the entities. In terms of size it can be noticed that people—vendors—are smaller than the road, so the figure-ground relation works for the terms of geometry represented by the entities.

8.8. Something something

Objects can also play a locative role since in this category locative relations rendered by prepositions **in**, **on** and **over** recognize objects **in**, **on** and **over** other objects (abstract or tangible).

In construction (73) ‘It dances in the air like a pale yellow genie released from a bottle’, the preposition indicates that entity 2 is containing entity 1. ‘It’ (entity 1) **in** ‘the air’ (entity 2), the same happens in construction (114) ‘Hulatang is so thick and gloopy it only reluctantly drips from the spoon, and rather than battle with its starchy remnants when washing up, many restaurants choose to serve it in bowls specially covered by a plastic bag’, where ‘bowls’ (entity 2—ground) are containing ‘Hulatang’ (entity 1—figure). According to Muñoz (2003), the difference would be in the kind of containers because ‘the air’ is a container of kind 4, immersion where it does not present limits or obstacles for the movements of the figure. In

construction (114), where the ground is 'bowls', and its role is being a container kind 1, container, where it presents its limits in all the possible directions.

In constructions (11) 'Letter from Indonesia: Meals on Wheels' and (14) 'As office-goers and other workers wait for buses or taxis, there are innumerable roadside mobile food outlets to serve them dinner. These are Jakarta's meals on wheels', 'Meals on wheels' does not mean that the meals drive or have wheels, it means that people bring the meals to your place by means of driving a car or a motorcycle. In these constructions, the locative relation rendered by the preposition **on**, indicates that the figure is 'meals' (entity 1) and the ground is 'wheels' (entity 2). The configuration according to Muñoz (2003) is support of kind 1, support, where the horizontal axis and vertical axis play indicated roles for the movement of the figure.

In construction (20) 'The preparation of this dish creates a shroud of smoke when the skewered meat is barbecued over a charcoal fire', the 'meat' is positioned or located **over** the 'fire' and the 'fire' (ground) acts as supporting the 'meat' (figure) and in construction (110) 'The cook ladles pancake mixture on to the hotplate, deftly spreads it with a single circular motion and sprinkles finely-chopped spring onions all over', 'onions'—figure—are located **over** the 'pancakes' (ground).

8.9. Something somewhere

The concept of 'somewhere' in this category represents a place, it can be or cannot be a physical place but the function is to depict location. Almost all the constructions found in this category show the same structure 'a thing located **in**, **on**, **at** or **over** a place' where the thing located plays the role of figure linked by the locative preposition to the ground—the place where the figure is located.

There are three different kinds of constructions, but they are not different in structure, they are different in terms of abstraction since the places where the figures are grounded are not regular places to locate things.

An example found in the texts is construction (57) 'In the distance, the warm, welcoming lights of Gangtok shine through a soft autumnal haze; when the cold months arrive, a bed of snow will flake the twinkling fairy lights of this hill town'. The entities recognized in this example are light and the distance, linked by the locative preposition **in**. Entity 1 'light', is contained by 'the distance', the 'light' can be seen but 'the distance' is an abstract entity that represents length and plays the role of a physical place. In this example the figure is 'light' and the ground is 'the distance'. The theory presented by Muñoz (2003), suggests that 'the distance' is one of the cases which is near to the metaphorical meaning of the configuration of preposition **in** when referring to immersion as when we refer to *the air, the wind, or the water*. The limits as a container are not clearly presented and there may not be obstacles avoiding the movement of the figure. I considered 'distance'² as a locative entity because according to Collins Dictionary (2006), the word has to do with space.

Construction (72) 'It's 35C in the shade and a pall of dust covers everything: grass, trees, the clipboard I'm holding', the entities that play roles in this example are '35C' and shade. Both are abstract entities but the shade can be a location since it will be set where the concrete object is. For example, 'the shade of a tree' or 'the shade of a building'. 35C represents the temperature contained by the shade, so the 'relative darkness' produced by the object contains the degrees that people feel. In this construction the locative relation rendered by preposition **in** links the figure '35C' **in** the ground 'shade'. In this case, the theory presented by Muñoz (2003), indicates that 'the shade' is a container of kind 3, surface, because the ground entity is two-dimensional, it presents length and width, its limits are less discrete and irrelevant.

The last example where the location is depicted by an abstract entity is construction (84) 'On the horizon a bullock cart shimmers in the heat, making its

²Distance (noun): The **distance between** two points or places is the amount of space between them.

slow approach like a mirage from a forgotten time'. 'The horizon' represents a physical place but nobody knows the exact location where it is. In this construction, the figure is entity 1 'a bullock cart' and the ground is 'the horizon'. The locative relation is rendered by preposition **on** and according to Muñoz (2003), it is a support of kind 3, which moves towards the support or towards the contact.

8.10. Somewhere something

It is not usual to find a place located **in/on/at/to/over** a thing. This category was created in order to analyze a metaphor because in terms of physical location, it is difficult to find a place **on** something.

An example found in the texts is construction (74) 'Soft grains coat my fingers. Nepal is on my skin, and beneath it too' has a metaphorical meaning since 'my skin' cannot physically carry 'Nepal'. In this case, 'Nepal' represents a smaller entity than 'my skin', being the first entity 1—the figure—and the second entity 2—the ground. The meaning of this construction goes beyond the literal meaning that it could have but the figure-ground relation is well depicted in terms of location by means of the preposition **on**. According to what Muñoz (2003) suggests in his theory, 'my skin' is supporting 'Nepal', so the role of preposition **on** in this case is to support the country, to demonstrate that I really appreciate being from Nepal.

8.11. Somewhere somewhere

Places can also be located **in/on** places; For example, a neighborhood can be located in a city or a city can be located in a country.

In the case of constructions (162) 'She was a much better poet than Neruda.' A bust of Mistral forms a focal point in the garden and one special vine comes from the Elqui valley in north Chile, where Mistral spent her childhood' and (56) 'Tranquil retreat ... an Indian Busshist woman rotates the prayer wheels at a monastery in Gangtok', entity 1 in both constructions are 'The Elqui Valley' and 'A monastery' and entity 2 are 'North Chile' and 'Gangtok'. In these two examples, entity 2 acts as

a container of entity 1, locating entity 1 inside entity 2. The locative relation here is rendered by preposition **in** and the figure-ground relation is depicted in terms of the size of the entities since a valley fits into the northern area of Chile and a monastery fits into a city, no other locative relation can be possible having those entities. The grounds here act both as containers and according to the theory presented by Muñoz (2003), their characteristics are of kind 3, surface, where they present width and length, its limits are less discrete, irrelevant and the figures seem to move with no restrictions.

In the case of construction (58) ‘We have crossed monasteries, temples and bridges lined with Buddhist prayer-flags on our way up, driving over rough Himalayan terrain in our journey to the mountains’, the locative preposition is **on** and is establishing a positional location of the buildings—monasteries, temples and bridges—related to ‘the way’. A way should look as a linear support for buildings, so it does not act as a container. If we draw ‘monasteries, temples and bridges’ (entity 1) lined **on** ‘our way up’ (entity 2) on a paper, the prominent entity and the figure would be ‘monasteries, temples and bridges’ which would be positioned **on** ‘our way up’—the ground. According to Muñoz (2003), this kind of support is 2, contact, there is a surface made for the purposes of making contact between figure and ground.

8.12. Other instances

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, 18 constructions were left out of the analysis, they fit into correct grammatical meanings but the function of the prepositions is to link two entities where the one playing the role of location is not a real location, i.e. They create a metaphorical locative relation.

The following table presents the information found where other instances of locative relations occur.

Constr. n°	Entity 1	Predication/Verb	Prep.	Entity 2
9	the local temple	starts up	in	the lulls
31	his top lip	Curls	in	Anger
76	They	talk together	In	Mithila
83	a girl		In	a crimson sari
115	a man	Dressed	In	Pijamas
125	They	Live	In	their night clothes
126	Those	who admit to being more comfortable	In	Pijamas
147	Gangawati	ushers me	in	for a cup of tea
148	daughter		In	Law
156	students		In	Overalls
171	Vows	Taken	In	The presence on naan
109	The cook	ladles pancake mixture	On	to the hotplate
78	The children	Look	at	Me
99	visitors	looking	to	sample the street snacks
117	local farms	should be flogged	to	Chinese dairy giants
132	This	Would lead	to	Police patrolling the streets wearing pyjamas
152	a garden	Dedicated	to	Italian ancestors
169	the finer points	are myriad	to	the discerning eye

Table n° 5: Other instances of locative relations.

The next graph summarizes the findings obtained from the 12 letters that are part of the corpus. At this stage of the analysis, I realized that the function of the prepositions is to link entity 1 with entity 2, which could be a real location entity or a metaphorical location entity. When I refer to real location entity, the locative relation is literal, i.e. entity 1 is a noun that acts as subject and entity 2 is a locative place or a tangible object. For example, 'The ball is **in** the basket'. When I refer to

metaphorical location entity, entity 2 is abstract. For example, 'I am **in** trouble'. From a total of 182 constructions containing the prepositions that depict locative relations, 85 contain preposition **in**, 32 contain preposition **on**, 7 contain preposition **at**, 48 contain preposition **to**, and 10 are constructed by means of preposition **over**.

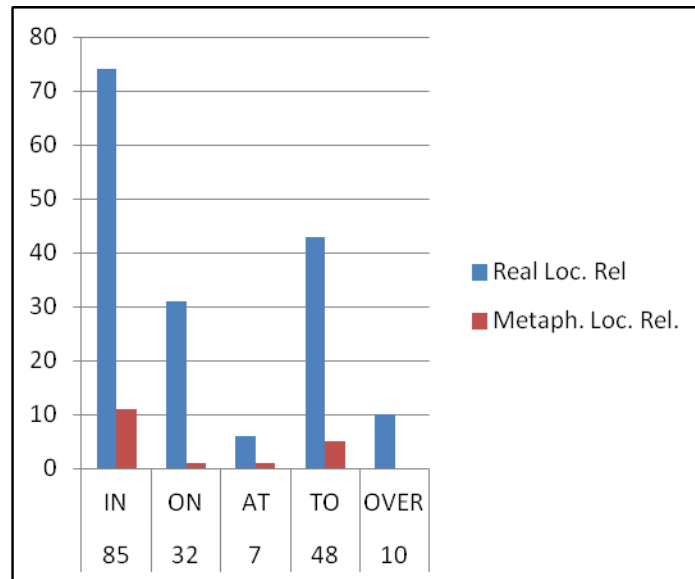
As we can observe, **in** is the most used preposition, it is due to the fact that locative entities (entity 2) act as containers of entity 1 in the constructions. From the 85 constructions containing preposition **in**, 74 link a noun with a tangible location entity and 11 contain a metaphorical locative relation.

The second preposition that is most used in the constructions is **to**, this preposition links entities in order to depict movement or action between entity 1 and entity 2. From a total of 48 instances, 43 link entity 1 to real locative entity 2 and 5 to metaphorical locative entity 2.

The following preposition, **on**, appears in 32 occasions. Preposition **on** is used to link two entities where entity 2 acts as a supporting surface of entity 1. From the 32 locative occurrences, 31 follow the real locative relation and only 1 the metaphorical locative relation. Here, there is a different aspect since the prepositional chunk of the construction is composed by two prepositions **on** and **to**, being part of a phrasal verb where they together establish a locative relation.

Preposition **at** is the least used preposition, from 7 occurrences with the locative preposition, 6 establish real locative relation and only 1 metaphorical locative relation.

Finally, preposition **over** is only part of real locative relations, being a total of 10 occurrences from the 182 constructions found in the corpus.



Graph nº 1: Frequency of occurrence of locative prepositions in real and metaphorical locative relations.

8.12.1. Metaphorical locative relations

They are metaphorical because the entity which is usually in charge of depicting the location is not a physical locative place.

Construction (31) His top lip curls in anger, or perhaps disdain, as he thinks of distant statesmen. The part of the construction taken to be analyzed is ‘His top lip curls **in** anger’, where entity 1 is ‘his top lip’ and entity 2 is ‘anger’. In this construction, ‘anger’ acts as containing ‘his top lip’ and gives the reader a clear image of the feeling involved by entity 2.

Construction (115) Fashion leader ... a man dressed in pyjamas rides his bicycle past a limousine in Beijing, China. We recognize ‘a man’ as entity 1 and ‘pyjamas’ as entity 2. The locative preposition **in** links this two entities by depicting a locative relation where entity 2, ‘pyjamas’, is the metaphorical place where ‘a man’ is located and it is containing entity 1 as a wrapping paper.

The case of metaphorical relations depicted in constructions (83), (115), (125), (126) and (156) where entity 2 are pieces of clothing, are considered an interesting case in the theory presented by Muñoz (2003), he mentions that clothing enter to be part to the container category because they seem to hold people as in the construction (125) 'In favour of parading their nightwear in public are shoppers who plan to go back to bed as soon as the supermarket shop is done, and others who say they can't afford dry cleaning so they live in their night clothes'. Where entity 1 (figure), 'they' is contained by entity 2 (ground), 'their night clothes'.

Construction (148) Gangawati ushers me in for a cup of tea served by her daughter-in-law, who hides shyly behind her. This is a different construction, entity 1 is 'daughter' and entity 2 is law but by means of the preposition they form the compound noun 'daughter-in-law', where preposition **in** plays an essential role. This noun comes from the ancient Indo-European custom, the newly wed woman went to live with her husband's family, so should be called 'daughter-in-law'; which has sense when referring to location. From the moment that the woman comes a wife, the law contains her to be part of the husband's family and her location now is with her husband by law.

Construction (78) The children are all jostling for position to get a better look at me. The entities that are taken from this constructions are 'look'—noun—and 'me'—pronoun. The locative relation is rendered by preposition **at**, which locates 'me' as entity 2, the most prominent entity (entity 1) is look and is positioned directly to the pronoun.

Construction (169) Foreigners could be forgiven for thinking that all naan is the same, but to the discerning eye the finer points are myriad. To shorten the construction, this clause had to be carefully decomposed in order to recognize the entities, being 'the finer points' entity 1 and 'the discerning eye' entity 2. These two entities are abstract since the writer here is giving meaning to 'point' and 'eye'. The locative preposition **to** seems to be showing movement or direction from entity 1 to

entity 2. Both entities have a similar shape, since they are referring to a point of view, someone's perception.

8.12.2. Phrasal verbs

While analysing, it was easy to get confused with the phrasal verbs because the prepositions carry meaning related to the verb that precedes it but they do not depict any locative relation. That is the case in the following two examples that I will show.

The first example is construction (147) 'Gangawati ushers me in for a cup of tea served by her daughter-in-law, who hides shyly behind her'. Where the entities recognized were 'Gangawati' as entity 1 and 'a cup of tea' as entity 2. The preposition involved is **in** but in this case it is part of the phrasal verb 'usher in', which means to protect someone. There are some cases where the verbs accept other prepositions, in those cases we would be in the presence of locative relations but in this case the meaning of the construction would change, so the locative relation is not possible.

The other example found in the text is construction (132) 'Whether this would lead to pyjama police patrolling the streets is unclear'. Preposition **to** is used in this case to show a relation between 'this' (something that is happening) and the situation of 'police patrolling the streets wearing pyjamas'. This issue is depicted by the preposition in terms of the verb because it also a phrasal verb since its meaning would also change if the preposition changes. The preposition **to** is not depicting a locative relation. The meaning of the phrasal verb 'lead to' is to cause and if we change the preposition, the meaning of the construction changes.

8.12.3. A different example

The following example did not fit into any of the categories of the analysis but I decided to include it because the preposition used in the construction depicts a locative relation. It is difficult to decide into which category this would fit because

the ground is neither a thing, nor an animal, or a person. I would consider that it is a metaphorical ground but the locative relation exists and it is not metaphorical.

The different Example found in the texts is construction (171) 'Vows taken in the presence of naan are binding and it must never be mistaken for bulka, the common loaf-shaped bread sold in plastic wrappings from Chinese-style supermarkets.' Where I recognized 'vows' as entity 1, the figure, and 'the presence of naan' as entity 2, the ground. The locative relation is rendered by the preposition **in** where the ground acts as a metaphorical container (immersion) of the 'vows'.

9. Discussion

As mentioned previously in the theory, prepositions are the parts of speech that language uses to refer to places and indicate location of entities in relation to the location of other entities. Those entities should ideally be people or objects playing the role of figure and places playing the role of ground.

As we could observe in the analysis and results section, the ideal entities playing the ideal roles do not really exist. I propose that language is dynamic, it changes and accepts variables. That is the reason why we found entities of different kinds playing roles which are not of their regular nature. That is why in some categories we found objects or people playing the role of locations.

In the following table, it is shown how the entities play different roles to the ones that they usually play and in the analyzed constructions they play the role of locations depicted by the prepositions.

Constr. n°	Entity 1	Locative Prep.	Entity 2	Real role of entity 2
(145)	Women	In	Maithili culture	Abstract object
(119)	Wearing pyjamas	In	Public	People
(133)	Benchmark	In	Fashion	Abstract object
(3)	Vendors	To	You	People
(151)	Hanuman	over	Celestial lovers	People
(149)	Artists	In	Style	Abstract object
(121)	Men	in	Fashion	Abstract object
(175)	Naan sellers	In	My mind	Abstract object
(6)	The milkman	On	His bike	Object
(38)	We	On	The news	Abstract object
(77)	I	On	Tide of children	People
(146)	Women	on	Walls	Object
(150)	I	At	My painting	Object
(124)	Shoppers	To	Bed	Object
(178)	We	to	A halt	Abstract object
(20)	Meat	Over	Fire	Object
(110)	Onions	over	Pancakes	Object
(73)	It	In	The air	Abstract object
(114)	Hulatang	In	Bowls	Object
(11)	Meals	On	Wheels	Object
(14)	Meals	On	Wheels	Object
(74)	Nepal	On	My skin	Object

Table n° 6: Real role of entity 2

As it can be observed, in all of the examples taken from the texts, entity 2 plays a locative role in the analyzed constructions and this role is clearly depicted by the prepositions **in**, **on**, **at**, **to** and **over**.

What I could observe from the examples taken from the texts in terms of the prepositions depicting locative relations is the following:

Preposition **in** links entity 1 and entity 2, giving entity 2 the role of container. The location is represented by the ground which can be rendered by places, points in time, situations, people, facts, objects and/or places, while entity 1 can be represented by people, groups of people, places, manner of performance or objects. What is interesting here is that this preposition is in charge of depicting the locative relation where the ground acts as a container of the figure in any of the kinds described by Muñoz (2003). So, prototypically, the entity that we usually know as 'place' will have geometrical specific characteristics which will determine the kind of container that this belongs to (container, partial container, surface or immersion).

The entity that plays the locative role linked by the preposition **on** can be rendered by place, object, means of transportation, and they act as surfaces supporting entity 1. In size they seem bigger than entity 1 that is why they may play the role of entity 2 (background). I cannot forget to mention an example from the texts that called my special attention since for me seemed to be inverted at the beginning. After analyzing the construction taken from the text, I found something really interesting. The construction is (74) 'Soft grains coat my fingers. Nepal is on my skin, and beneath it too'. Of course the meaning is metaphorical, as I mentioned in the analysis, the preposition **on** locates 'Nepal' **on** the narrator's skin, which is impossible to happen, I believe the narrator is trying to express that he/she is really involved in the job that he/she is doing, so he/she feels part of Nepal at that moment.

Preposition **at** was found in verb constructions as 'entity 1 looks **at** entity 2' where entity 2 acts as the ground for the figure (entity 1). For this preposition the locative role played by the components of the construction is the usual role played by locative prepositions linking an entity 1 with a location—entity2. At a certain point of the analysis, the fact that 'look at' is a phrasal verb, made me think about considering it when analyzing. If we take the verb 'look', it changes its meaning if the preposition changes, so we will have different meanings if we have 'look into',

'look after', 'look to', 'look around', 'look in', among others. What I intend to demonstrate is that the preposition **at** depicts the locative relation intended by the preposition in this phrasal verb, so in this case it works as it is depicted in the construction (150) 'I' (figure) look **at** 'my painting' (ground).

In the case of preposition **to**, the prominence principle will work easily. In this case, when entities 1 and 2 are people, since they have the same value in terms of size, the importance and the focus of attention will depend on the narrator, speaker or writer. In this case, the preposition, the verb and the intention of the narrator play a key role establishing the prominence because the entities are at the same level; they share similar geometrical characteristics and belong to the same parts of speech.

This preposition will also show movement in some cases as in the following example: 'She approached to me', where 'She' is entity 1, moving **to** 'me' (entity 2) and will indicate towards which entity the performance will be directed **to**.

The preposition **over** shows position and prominence of an entity in relation to other entity, **over** shows hierarchy of the entities and the locative relation will depend on the intention of the speaker, writer or narrator. Preposition **over** also involves location of figure related to ground. In this case, the figure is located without touching the ground, there is not contact.

10. Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to describe the connections between visual and linguistic perception and demonstrate that language can also be analyzed by means of prominence. This study will benefit linguists and cognitive linguistics in getting acquainted with the connections between visual images and linguistic units and demonstrating that there is another approach different to the traditional explanation of grammatical structures and word meanings. It would also benefit applied linguists who are interested in researching about the acquisition of language, how humans perceive words, and how these words can be related to the mental and visual images that we have set in our minds.

This study intends to be a contribution to the illustration of the discussed theories, since sometimes they need to be demonstrated graphically with real examples taken from situations that happen in the real world.

The prominence of the entities in the locative relations is rendered by the prepositions, in this case the prepositions involved in the study were **in**, **on**, **at**, **to** and **over**; for the purposes of this research, those prepositions were enough to observe and describe the locative relations that I needed for the study. From the theory explained, it had to be set that there is a figure and a ground in a construction, where the figure is always the most prominent entity set according the ground at a certain position.

Also, It was found that the preposition **in** indicated that the figure was contained totally, in a surface, or immersed depending on the geometrical characteristics of the entity playing the role of ground. As observed in category *something something*, a total container is three-dimensional and limits the movement of the figure; it is demonstrated in construction (114), where the container is 'bowls'. In other categories as *a point in time somewhere*, *a situation somewhere*, *someone somewhere*, *something somewhere* and *somewhere somewhere*, where the ground is recognized as a place, the container when the

locative preposition is **in** will have a surface function since according to Muñoz (2003), the entity presents width and length, its limits are less discrete and normally defined by convention; those are cases as constructions (134) 'the city', (120) 'the supermarkets', (1) 'Jaffna', (72) 'shade' and (162) 'north Chile', where the ground are real places. The last kind of container found in the analysis was immersion, which is present in the following categories, *people/facts in a group*, *someone in a manner of performance*, *someone something*, *something something* and *something somewhere*. Examples of these are constructions as (145) 'Maithili culture', (149) 'style', (175) 'my mind', (73) 'the air' and (57) 'the distance', which represent abstract entities where figures are located.

Preposition **on** indicated support for the figure where there were contact at a point between the figure and the ground. According to the theory presented by Muñoz (2003) described in the theoretical framework section, the three kinds of support for this preposition were found in the constructions taken from texts. The categories where the support kind was found were *something something* and *somewhere something*, depicted by constructions (11) and (14) 'wheels' and (74) 'my skin'. The contact kind was found in the *somewhere somewhere* kind with the construction (58) 'our way' as example. Finally categories *someone something* and *someone somewhere* carry examples of constructions where the ground is support of kind movement towards the support or towards the contact; these constructions are (6) 'his bike', (77) 'tide of children' and (176) 'our way' which involve any kind of movement in order to get to the contact or the support.

Preposition **at** was used in locative relations where there was total immobility, the case found was depicted in category *someone somewhere* with construction (18), where the ground is 'roadside'. The figure did not move and was located **at** that exact point.

Preposition **to** depicted locative relations where the figure moved towards the ground and they showed similar geometrical characteristics. This preposition

was found in the following categories *someone someone*, *someone something* and *someone somewhere* and the locative relation was demonstrated in the following constructions by the following entities: (3) 'you', (124) 'where a girl in a crimson sari is a flame against the green' and (82) 'bed'.

Finally, preposition **over** depicted its locative relation between figure and ground in the sense that the figure was positioned according to the ground without touching it, found in categories as *someone someone*, *someone somewhere* and *something something* where the locative relations were depicted by entities as in constructions as (151) 'Hanuman' being the role of the figure, 'the celestial lovers', being the ground; (16) 'vendors' as figure and 'the sides of the road' as ground; and (20) 'meat' playing the role of the figure and 'fire', the ground.

In conclusion, figure and ground give the reader the guide needed to establish the locative relations set by the locative prepositions. After checking the theory and analysing the data, it can be concluded that there are not figure nouns or ground nouns, the entities will play dynamic roles depending on the corresponding functions, so people or things can play location roles which are depicted by the locative prepositions. Finally, it can be said that the role of the locative prepositions studied is not only to link the figure and the ground but also indicate the prominent entity and establish the location rendered by itself.

11. Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study are related to the theory in the field. For example, as can be noticed, limited references have been consulted because the field has not been extensively studied. However, further studies on categories and prototypes can be carried out. Regarding this issue, there are some arguments that can be made with their relations with prepositions, especially locative prepositions.

Also a study on other prepositions can be done. This study was focused on locative prepositions but other categories of prepositions as manner or time exist. Other studies can be carried out in order to establish other relations and determine if there are other principles as 'Prominence' to relate visual images with language.

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13. Appendix

Letter 1

URL:<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/03/letter-from-sri-lanka-vendors>

Sri Lanka: saved by the bell

In Jaffna, you don't go to the supermarket. Vendors cycle to you, and they all have their own ring tones

Stop me and buy one ... a Sri Lankan fruit vendor sells king coconuts from his bicycle. Photograph: Ishara Kodikara/AFP

In a world of internet shopping, shopping in [Jaffna](#) comes as a pleasant surprise; they do things a little differently here. The first tinkle of a bicycle bell can be heard at about 5.30am – the milkman on his bike, dispensing milk from an old metal churn into housewives' recycled bottles and jars. This discreet little tinkle is followed by the very much less discreet, irritating tune of the bread van. Dah da dah, dah da dah, dah da da dah. And again. And again. You wonder how much bread can possibly be needed on one small street.

A bit later, when you have just shaken off the tune of the bread van, a different, louder and even more persistent jingle: the ice-cream van. Competing with the bread van, the vendor has cranked up the volume and added bass. It's the Tom Jones of the van vendors: the funky beat promising sexy, irresistible ice-cream.

After all this aural stimulation, the apologetic tinkle of the fishmonger on his wiry old bike is a relief. The housewives swarm around, elbowing their neighbours out of the way to secure the best fish at the best price. The scales are brought out and the process of weighing and bargaining, adjusting and re-negotiating, begins. The fishmonger is followed by his friend the veg vendor, with his old wooden cart, selling fresh vegetables to accompany the fish, and papaya for dessert.

Throughout the day, a straggle of old men on old bikes pass by, offering services and goods – bicycle repairs, newspapers, soft drinks – each with a subtly different ring. My bell identification skills are elementary, but my neighbours are experts, scurrying out of the house only for specific rings. Then it's time to pick up the pace for the evening round. Bread, ice cream (again?), fish, vegetables, lottery tickets. Usually the vans stagger their visits, but sometimes they converge, resulting in competing tunes and frantic housewives.

In the brief lulls between musical retail activity the local temple starts up. There's always a festival: there are so many gods and all of them seem to demand noise. My sister phoned. What's all that noise, she said. Which one, I asked, the bread van, ice-cream van, fish man, temple, crows?

It's noisy, the tunes are irritating, but I wouldn't have it any other way. Internet shopping? No thanks, where's the fun in that?

Letter 2

URL: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jun/26/letter-indonesia-mobile-food-vendors>

Letter from Indonesia: Meals on wheels

Jakarta's mobile street vendors give commuters the stomach to battle the city's traffic

Food for the fraught ... street food in Jakarta. Photograph: Bay Ismoyo/AFP/Getty Images

[Jakarta](#)'s peak hours in the early evening are a nightmare for drivers. The irresistible traffic weaves a conundrum around every homeward-bound soul's brain. Macet, as it is known in the local tongue, is part and parcel of life in the city. As office-goers and other workers wait for buses or taxis, there are innumerable roadside mobile food outlets to serve them dinner. These are Jakarta's meals on wheels.

The places are often crowded and long benches are laid out next to the walls of high-rise buildings. Some vendors even provide chairs and tables. In some streets, there is an array of vendors sprawled all over the sides of the road. Most of them start their business in late afternoon, though there are round-the-clock servers too. Each vendor has a designated spot, so the patrons can walk to their favourite ones without getting lost.

It wasn't easy for me at the beginning to dine at the roadside, with smoke often enveloping the surroundings. However, it is not difficult to adjust when you start to taste the local food. [Satay](#), or grilled chicken, is popular all over the country. The preparation of this dish creates a shroud of smoke when the skewered meat is barbecued over a charcoal fire. When served with peanut sauce, it tastes

scrumptious. Mie bakso, meatball with noodle, is another favourite. The vendors also offer appetisers such as pangsit goreng (a crispy snack stuffed with meat) and [batagor](#) (fried fish dumpling).

People often turn up in groups, straight from their workplaces. After a weary day at the office, most Indonesians look for much-needed relaxation. These food kiosks are an affordable place where they talk their hearts out with broad, lavish smiles. No one seems to be bothered by the smoke or the rush hour's endless honking. I have also seen bands playing to entertain people during their dinner. The guitar-decked street musicians are a common sight and for the customers they have become part of the evening.

There is plenty to choose from. I got used to regularly consuming [ikan bakar](#), grilled fish: so tantalising. Local food items are the most popular. Some of the streets in central Jakarta even have vendors serving delicacies from different islands of the country. It's curious to see how they showcase the country's food culture in their own humble ways.

Letter 3

URL:<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/aug/09/burkina-faso-djibo-road-protest>

Burkina Faso: Local road protest heard across the airwaves

Protesters in Djibo hope demands picked up by Radio France Internationale will not fall on deaf ears in Ougadougou

Burkinabe opposition supporters rally in the capital Ouagadougou, this time against the rising cost of living and the regime of long-serving President Blaise Compaoré.
Photograph: Ahmed Ouoba/Getty

It is the day before [Djibo](#)'s weekly market. Usually its narrow streets would be thick with the fumes of 20-tonne lorries dropping off their wares, but today the town is eerily quiet and smoke-free.

About 5km south of the market, about 40 lorries are parked up, bumper to bumper, hulking and impotent. On a narrow bridge in front of the first lorry, a massive tree trunk lies, and nailed to the trunk is a neatly stencilled banner: *Le route de développement, c'est le développement de la route*. The road of development is the development of the road.

On the Djibo side of the roadblock, a huge marquee straddles the road and 100 or more teenage boys sit beneath it. There are chairs, table, a big music system and three microphones. Blasting from the amps is the song Dar Es Salaam by Burkinabè rap duo [Yeleen](#). The boy closest to the music system raps along: "Your palace is too far to hear the echoes of our grief/ You don't have to hear your people crying justice, hope and peace." His top lip curls in anger, or perhaps disdain, as he thinks of distant statesmen. A tall boy wearing a baseball cap grabs one of the microphones and turns it on. He gestures to rapper boy to turn the music down.

"Six years ago the president came to Djibo," shouts Baseball Cap in heavily accented French. "He saw that our road is not even fit for donkey carts. He promised us tarmac all the way to [Ouagadougou](#). Today we shall hold him to account. Until we hear from him, not a single vehicle will enter or leave this town."

The teenagers are clearly the vanguard of this protest, but the rest of the community is out in force. Shopkeepers loll on motorbikes. Turbaned shepherds stand and gaze. Knots of older men sit in the shade of acacia trees. Young women sashay among the crowd balancing plates of mangoes and yams on their heads.

Morsels of gossip ripple among the protesters: "The Haut Commissaire is refusing to come and see our roadblock." "A truckful of goldminers are going to try and drive around the blockade." "We're on the news! Radio France Internationale is talking about the Djibo road demonstration. When has our little town ever been talked about in Paris?"

When, indeed? And if the echoes of Djibo's grief can resound in Versailles, perhaps even the marbled palaces of Ouagadougou are not entirely soundproof.

Letter 4

URL: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jul/05/weekly-letter-from-rwanda-walls>

Rwanda: Family divided on leaving valley home

It's a bone-shaking drive to reach, but this farm offers warm hospitality

A source of income in Rwanda...fresh, pre-roasted coffee beans. Photograph: Jose Cendon/AFP

My Kinyarwanda teacher, Theo, was keen for me to meet his parents, who live in a remote part of eastern [Rwanda](#). Getting there involved a bone-jarring journey uphill, which ended when a winding side track finally petered out. We clambered off our motos and proceeded down a steep hill passing sorghum, banana and coffee fields.

Theo waved to everyone tending their crops and they responded with *amakuru toto* (how are you, young one) – his childhood nickname. I was introduced to several smallholders, most of whom seemed to be aunties and uncles of some kind, then Theo pointed to a house below us. We had arrived.

Tharcissie (Mama) and Etienne (Papa) went out of their way to make me feel welcome, preparing a delicious meal of rice, beans and peas with fresh hens' eggs. Tharcissie makes the most exquisite baskets, each taking at least three days, for which she receives a meagre \$8 from a co-operative in [Kigali](#). Etienne makes an occasional income from selling the coffee from his small plantation and they have two cows. They are by no means the poorest people in the valley.

Theo disappeared, leaving me to fend for myself in Kinyarwanda with Tharcissie and French with Etienne. We chatted about farming, beer and the government's decision to move all the valley farmers to the top of the hill as part of its land consolidation policy. A neighbour has already accepted the decision and is set to

move out. Etienne worries about not being close to his coffee plants, but Tharcissie is keen to move, as she doesn't want to spend her old age isolated in the valley.

The government has promised to provide housing for all displaced valley dwellers. The idea is then to knock down the valley houses and expand the area of productive farmland. Farmers will then have to go down the hills each day to tend their crops.

When Theo returned it was time to head off down the bumpy road. Tharcissie and Etienne accompanied us back up the hill to await the return of the moto drivers.

The crowd looked on spellbound as I struggled back into my plastic dust trousers. Then, with *murakoze cyane* (thank you very much) and *murabeho* (goodbye), smiles and waves, we were gone.

Letter 5

URL: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/oct/23/letter-from-india-gangtok-sikkim>

Letter from India: the welcoming lights of Gangtok

A long drive from plains to mountain peaks reveals a jewel hidden in the Himalayas

Tranquil retreat ... an Indian Buddhist woman rotates the prayer wheels at a monastery in Gangtok. Photograph: Deshakalyan Chowdhury/AFP/Getty

The road winds tortuously up into the Shivaliks, leaving the Teesta river behind to wend its way through the plains. In the distance, the warm, welcoming lights of Gangtok shine through a soft autumnal haze; when the cold months arrive, a bed of snow will flake the twinkling fairy lights of this hill town.

We have crossed monasteries, temples and bridges lined with Buddhist prayer-flags on our way up, driving over rough Himalayan terrain in our journey to the mountains. Clear springs and hamlets pop out of what could be nowhere, but for the fact that even at 3,000 metres above sea level, the consumerist trappings of civilisation are kept alive through puffy bags of crisps and crates of soft drinks, sold alongside hot Darjeeling tea.

After hours of travel up narrow, twisting roads, we find ourselves in Gangtok, the capital of the state of Sikkim. Buildings crowd the slopes, and people stroll unhurriedly around, as if absorbing the tales of a past long gone but still lingering in spirit. It feels almost like a journey through time: Gangtok is quite different from the cities of the plains, but possibly like the quintessential colonial-era Himalayan towns. You can almost conjure up images of British sahibs and their elegantly dressed wives trotting up and down these hill roads on their horses, looking for respite from the searing heat of the plains. All you need, in fact, is a haunted dak bungalow to complete the story.

Today, the main thoroughfare, MG Road, is a paved street only for pedestrians. It is lined by restaurants and shops, ending in a nondescript, dank movie theatre. The lamp-posts are mounted with Bose loudspeakers playing Hindi movie songs from the early 90s. Something about the very air evokes nostalgia.

It is close to 8pm, and a cloudy mist descends heavily over the town, people reduced to blurry shapes. Shopkeepers begin to rustle up their wares; some already have their shutters down.

With its extraordinary mix of faiths and traditions, Gangtok defies slotting into any single category. It isn't ostentatious opulence that takes your breath away, but simplicity. Up in its quiet Himalayan corner, it lives a rich, happy life, with ready smiles that mask its troubles.

Letter 6

URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/nov/27/letter-from-nepal-terai>

Letter from Nepal: Terai times

On the plains beneath the Himalayas, village life has an enduring, timeless quality

Warm work ... harvesting rice in the Terai region of Nepal. Photograph: Mark Boulton/Alamy

Our jeep bucks and sways as we make our way out to the villages where we'll spend our last day on the Terai. It's 35C in the shade and a pall of dust covers everything: grass, trees, the clipboard I'm holding. It dances in the air like a pale yellow genie released from a bottle. I run my tongue over my teeth and a piece of grit crunches. Soft grains coat my fingers. Nepal is on my skin, and beneath it too.

We pull into the shade of a peepal tree where a group of children are having class. Dropati Devi, a rural health facilitator born and raised in this community, crosses the courtyard, her feet kicking up dust from the dung floor.

The afternoon heat presses against my skin and I can smell woodsmoke. The only sounds are the breek and gargle of insects and the low voices of the women as they talk together in Mithila.

I feel someone pluck the sleeve of my kurta and turn to find it's Sychal, a stunningly beautiful woman with a wide smile. Here Muslims and Hindus live in harmony. We exchange *a'salaams* then she motions me to follow her, and I'm swept into her house on a tide of giggling children. She offers me tea and harvests a papaya that we share, its cool sweetness so refreshing.

The children are all jostling for position to get a better look at me. One of them stumbles and kicks a steel thali from the top of a bowl, revealing two mudskippers. One of the fish makes a writhing bid for freedom. Just as I manage to grab this

slippery customer and return it to the bowl, its cellmate is over the side and away. Eventually and with much laughter this fish is also caught. There'll be lunch after all.

Dropati motions me to follow her. She serves sweet spicy chai in small glasses while I get acquainted with her latest grandchild, a smiling baby girl with thick kohl daubed around her eyes to ward off evil spirits. The local sadhu drops by. Suddenly we're all asking questions about each others' lives and I get the sense that I've passed some kind of test and am accepted by these people. It's a sweet feeling.

I look beyond the wall of the courtyard across vivid paddy fields to where a girl in a crimson sari is a flame against the green. On the horizon a bullock cart shimmers in the heat, making its slow approach like a mirage from a forgotten time.

Letter 7

URL: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/sep/25/letter-malaysia-kuala-lumpur>

Letter from Malaysia: flavour and colour

Little India is less visited but very much an integral part of Kuala Lumpur's culture

A vendor counts money at a vegetable market in Kuala Lumpur. Photograph: Saeed Khan/AFP/Getty

Kuala Lumpur when pictured from afar is to most people the largely English-speaking capital city of an Asian Muslim state. Visitors immediately notice the Chinese influences, adding more detail to their understanding, while a lucky few stumble into Little India for an unforgettable assault on the senses.

Pink pavements, beautifully garish arches and music from all directions – blending and competing simultaneously – instantly tell you you're in the right place. Follow your nose to flower sellers filling a side street with primary colours, your stomach to the restaurants and hawker stools spilling seats and customers into the throng, or simply your curiosity up and down until you begin to make sense of the delightful insanity of it all.

Although a few tourists regularly visit, it remains less travelled and entirely authentic: the shops sell Indian jewellery and clothes primarily to the local community, the flowers are for festivals and celebrations, the incense in the air appears well before the people, and even the driving and parking feel more like Mumbai than Malaysia. Visitors come by morning and are gone by night, but their passing is barely noticed as life continues.

All over Asia, life revolves around food, and here, food revolves around plants and spices. You can eat chicken tandoori, but most just grab a plastic plate and heap rice on to a banana leaf, piling on daal and countless vegetables cooked in countless flavours with buffet-style freedom, then dive in.

Teh and kopi (tea and coffee) wash down gossip 24 hours a day, both of which can be C (with milk), O (without milk), or kosong (without sugar). The well-known roti (flat bread) is ordered from tourist's guidebooks, while the lesser-known thosai provides a pancake-like breakfast or afternoon snack. Tables and seats are pleasingly plastic and functional, walls grubby, aprons stained: guarantees of substance over style for around \$2.

After the heat, colour and chaos, visitors often retreat to the relative, air-conditioned sanity of nearby KL Sentral station – ears ringing and eyes overloaded – to cool down and collect their thoughts. But Little India will leave a lasting memory for many, just as its people and culture have become an integral part of the city they call home.

Letter 8

URL: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/sep/11/letter-from-china-street-food>

Letter from China: street food

A hearty appetite is a must for visitors looking to sample the street snacks in Xi'an's Muslim Quarter

Comforting ... people eat Laba porridge, which is made with rice, beans, nuts and dried fruits, in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, China. Photograph: China Photos/Getty

Evenings in Xi'an's Muslim Quarter are renowned for their street snacks, which attract swarms of hungry visitors. However, only local residents seem to appreciate the tranquil mornings, when boisterous night markets are replaced by simple breakfast stalls. The nocturnal cacophony of hawkers' cries and motorcycle horns contrasts with the hushed morning soundtrack of contented slurping and energetic birdsong.

Summer breakfasts in the Muslim Quarter are enjoyed outdoors to take advantage of the cooling breeze. Weathered canvas awnings shelter diners from the ferocious sun, and help transform pavements into alfresco dining rooms. Stainless steel trolleys with gas burners are wheeled outside to form kerbside kitchens, which display their carefully chopped ingredients and bubbling pots to entice potential customers.

By sharing pavement space, the boundaries between neighbouring restaurants become blurred, creating a communal atmosphere. This overlap between businesses is encouraged by the restaurant owners, who seem to be complementing each other, rather than competing, as they shout the names of their specialities to passing customers. Friends with different tastes are welcome to buy their favourite foods separately, then sit down together among the jumbled assortment of fold-up tables and dented metal stools.

Although China has an extremely varied cuisine, there is surprising uniformity among breakfast choices. The same dishes are commonly found throughout the country, but each one is subtly adapted to local preferences. In Xi'an's Muslim Quarter, small white pots of condiments adorn every table, encouraging customers to flavour their food with dark vinegar, and chilli with sesame seeds. Here, a bowl of doufunao – pieces of soft, white tofu – is mixed with soy beans and pickled vegetables, swimming in a hot, sour sauce perfect for mopping up with momo – freshly made unsalted steamed bread.

Another nationwide favourite is jianbing guozi – a savoury fried pancake made distinctively local by adding sesame paste. It is prepared on an old smoke-blackened metal drum whose flat top acts as a sizzling hotplate, exuding aromas of hot oil and charcoal. The cook ladles pancake mixture on to the hotplate, deftly spreads it with a single circular motion and sprinkles finely-chopped spring onions all over. As the mixture sets and becomes crispy, an egg is cracked over the middle. A minute later, everything is piping hot and the cook uses something that resembles a wallpaper scraper to ease the pancake off the hotplate, tidying up the edges and folding it into quarters. Jianbing guozi is one of the few dishes to be eaten by hand, rather than with chopsticks, adding a touch of hearty satisfaction to every bite.

One dish that is truly indigenous to this neighbourhood is hulatang – a peppery soup of carrot, potato, onion, cauliflower, beef and cabbage. It simmers in metre-high stainless steel drums that send wafts of steam across the street and into the faces of passersby. Hulatang is so thick and gloopy it only reluctantly drips from the spoon, and rather than battle with its starchy remnants when washing up, many restaurants choose to serve it in bowls specially covered by a plastic bag.

With a stomach lined with hulatang, lips tingling from chilli sauce, and skin already prickling from the growing heat of the day, the best way to end the meal is a cool

glass of suanmeitang – a local sour plum cordial sweetened with sugar. All that remains after that is to begin the considerable task of digestion.

Letter 9

URL: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/aug/21/new-zealand-gisborne-pyjamas>

Letter from New Zealand: pyjama party

The city of Gisborne debates whether its attire is on trend with Dubai and London, or if its residents are simply lazy

Fashion leader ... a man dressed in pyjamas rides his bicycle past a limousine in Beijing, China. Photograph: Cancan Chu/Getty

The north-eastern city of Gisborne is divided and people are angry. It's not the issue of water ownership that threatens the peace of this normally unflappable community, or whether local farms should be flogged to Chinese dairy giants. Even escalating rate bills hardly raise a sweat, let alone the imminent commencement of fracking operations in nearby hills. The cause of the fury is the latest craze for wearing pyjamas in public, especially noticeable in the supermarkets. The fashion has been initiated by women but bets are on as to how long it will be before men sew up their flies and join in.

Letters to the local paper, mostly unsigned, are split between "Disgusted" and "I Love my PJs". In favour of parading their nightwear in public are shoppers who plan to go back to bed as soon as the supermarket shop is done, and others who say they can't afford dry cleaning so they live in their night clothes. Then there those who admit to being more comfortable in pyjamas and don't care about the opinions of others. "I am not ashamed", said one woman, hitching up her slipping trousers as she bent over to unload her trolley.

Angry pronouncements against public PJ wearing include accusations of laziness and unhygienic behaviour. One writer suggested that pyjamas will bring lice and bed bugs into food shops. Someone else argued that if people wanted to wear

pyjamas in public they should go to Dubai or London. Another person fumed that even in Nepal people dress nicely. "Where is your pride?" the writer asked.

The district council is being urged to issue a ban on the wearing of pyjamas in public, day or night, and for offenders to be fined. Whether this would lead to pyjama police patrolling the streets is unclear.

Has Gisborne, a geographically remote city, set a new benchmark in fashion? Imagine my surprise therefore when, the other morning in the city I saw a man wearing a dark grey, bespoke suit, a silk tie and black polished Oxfords. Perhaps he was a visiting lawyer or a stockbroker selling shares in a fracking company. The point is he stood out among the informal crowds and was easily outnumbered by pyjamas.

I realised then how fickle fashion is. Suits could be back tomorrow. I've decided to hold off sewing up my PJ flies, just in case.

Letter 10

URL: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/aug/07/letter-nepal-maithili-ramayana-art>

Letter from Nepal: old love story

A visit to the town of Janakpur provides Maithili art depicting the Indian epic The Ramayana

An Indian physically challenged artist impersonates Hindu demon Ravana during a performance of The Ramayana in Bangalore, India. Photograph: Dibyangshu Sarkar/Getty

I was in Janakpur to collect a painting by Gangawati Das, a 45-year-old Maithili woman who works in the Janakpur Women's Development Centre, an organization set up in 1989 to promote the work of female artists. Maithili women are among the poorest and most marginalised people in the Terai plains of east Nepal.

India's oldest love story began in Janakpur. It is where Rama, Prince of Ayodhya, came to marry the beautiful daughter of the King of Mithila, the lovely Sita. Their story is told in the most popular of the Indian epics, The Ramayana, written around 500BC.

It is also why Janakpur boasts 120 temples, including the fantastic Mogul-inspired Janaki Mandir, one of Nepal's most picturesque. Next door to its elegant stucco facade is a hideous modern brick-and-glass building that commemorates the spot where Rama and Sita married. Thousands of pilgrims visit every day.

Fortunately, the JWDC where Gangawati works is surrounded by green paddy fields and shady mango groves. The artists work sitting cross-legged on the floor painting on Nepali lokta paper, made from the bark of Himalayan shrubs.

In Maithili culture it is only the women who paint; on the freshly plastered mud walls of their houses, they celebrate marriages, births or Hindu festivals such as Deepawali.

The paintings usually depict some of the pantheon of Hindu gods. Nowadays, the artists have a more modern repertoire: recent commissions include posters that highlight the danger of HIV or the need to register for elections.

When I visit Gangawati, the outside of her simple, mud-plastered house is adorned with a large painting of Hanuman, the Monkey King who helped Rama rescue Sita after she had been abducted by the evil King Ravana.

Gangawati ushers me in for a cup of tea served by her daughter-in-law, who hides shyly behind her. Gangawati was married to her husband at the age of 16.

I look at my painting. In the folk style of Maithili artists, Gangawati has painted all the birds around her home: tiny screech owls, a crested hoopoe, a colourful openbill stork and a dazzling blue peacock.

The celestial lovers are here as well, eating a cob of corn while Hanuman watches discreetly over them.

Letter 11

URL: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/may/08/letter-from-valparaiso-garden-chile>

Letter from Chile: blooming metropolis

A garden dedicated to Italian ancestors offers a fine vantage point over the colourful city of Valparaíso

Steady climb ... a funicular train climbs one of the steep hills in Valparaíso.
Photograph: David R Frazier Photolibrary/Alamy

Valparaíso means Valley of Paradise, but there's little of heaven about this city. The streets are festooned with overhead wiring, the broken pavements are foul with dog mess and several of the famous funiculars are out of service. Rubbish collects in the gullies between the 40-odd hills across which the city sprawls.

But Valpo, as everyone calls it, somehow retains a battered charm. People are usually friendly. And some of them are trying to make a difference.

One sunny Saturday, parties of students in overalls are deploying from a central square, freshening up the paintwork on the ground floors of buildings. Crumbling old townhouses, especially those in or near the World Heritage area, are being done up. Some are being reborn as boutique guesthouses, others as handicraft shops or chic restaurants.

And the top of one of the rubbish-choked gullies has been transformed into a garden and viewpoint.

"When I started, there was nothing here – nothing but stones and dust and garbage," says Pedro Palomino Sierra (not his real name). Pedro, like a benevolent Ancient Mariner, happily seizes upon any passerby and shares the story of his creation.

"I wanted to do something to mark the connection between Valpo and Camogli, in Italy," he says. This part of the city, he explains, was settled in the late 19th century by immigrants from the Ligurian town of Camogli – he is descended from them – and many locals speak Italian as their second language.

The result of Pedro's dream is a wide, curved promenade forming the Mirador de Camogli, where a mosaic commemorates the immigrants' journey from Europe to Chile, and below it the steeply sloping garden. The link to Camogli is reaffirmed by olive and pine trees, both raised from seed brought from Liguria. The pines produce pine-nuts for pesto.

"I also wanted to make a homage to Gabriela Mistral. She was a much better poet than Neruda." A bust of Mistral forms a focal point in the garden and one special vine comes from the Elqui valley in north Chile, where Mistral spent her childhood.

Making the garden has been a kind of purgatory. It took six years to get municipal permission to go ahead, says Pedro. But he smiles and returns to his garden, a memorial to the past and a promise for the future.

Letter 12

URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jan/17/letter-from-china-uighur-naan>

Letter from China: Taste of home

For the Uighur Chinese, the naan is a sacred part of daily life

Daily bread: bakers making flatbread in Kashgar, Xinjiang, China.

We scrape and squeal our way through the permafrosted outskirts of Urumqi. It is midwinter, half past nine at night. Nadira is putting the finishing touches to her plans for a getaway to China's southern shores.

We are on the hunt for bread. Not just any old bread but naan, the holy grail of central Asian cuisine without which no expedition to China's eastern shores could be endured. Naan has to be a last-minute purchase. Nadira must have enough for her month-long sojourn and Lop Nur naan, noted for its longevity and capacity to withstand the damp air of her island retreat, would be just the thing. Lop Nur, an ancient lake, has become the source of Urumqi's latest naan craze: she has ordered 200.

Naan is usually a disc-shaped, sesame-sprinkled loaf best eaten hot from the pot-bellied clay ovens that dot Uighur neighbourhoods. Foreigners could be forgiven for thinking that all naan is the same, but to the discerning eye the finer points are myriad.

The most sacred naan of all is, of course, that from one's home town and no journey is complete without bags full of the discs bulging from every piece of luggage. Lies must not be told in the presence of naan; it must not be thrown, trampled under foot or thrown away. Vows taken in the presence of naan are binding and it must never be mistaken for bulka, the common loaf-shaped bread sold in plastic wrappings from Chinese-style supermarkets. Naan is as close to a Uighur's heart as the blood coursing through his veins.

We slither up to the limits of the city where no snowplough has gone before. We pass, in my mind, several perfectly good naan sellers on our way, but Nadira is unwavering. It has to be Lop Nur naan or nothing. We close in on our objective. We finally skid to a halt.

Neither of us has actually seen Lop Nur naan and when a rough wooden door opens to reveal a dusty grey pile of tiny bagel-shaped nuggets in a corner, Nadira's face falls. They are a far cry from the familiar golden spheres she is used to, but what can she do? Not daring to criticise naan in public, we grab 200 and retreat as precariously as we had come back to the city. Passing my local baker on the way home just closing up for the night, she jumps out and buys 100 of the more familiar shapes. She is now ready to head south.