

Spanish *por* + *a* > *para* : loss of compositionality in grammaticalization

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We make a quantitative argument that the evolution of the Spanish preposition *para*, exemplified in (1), involves ‘chunking’ of two frequently co-occurring earlier prepositions, *por* and *a*, and ensuing loss of compositionality. The corpus for the present study comprises 17 texts, beginning with *El cantar de mio Cid* (12th c.), and draws on two prose texts for each subsequent century, from the 16th onward one peninsular and one from New Spain/Mexico. For each century approximately 1,000 tokens of *por* and *para* were extracted, for a total of 8108.

- (1) a. *fueron-se para la ribera de la mar*
go.PFV.3PL-REFL to ART.DEF.F.SG shore of the sea
b. *para se y- r*
to REFL go-INF
‘they went to the shore to depart’ [14th c. *Zifar*, 89]

From the earliest texts we see variation between allative ‘to’ (1a) and purposive ‘for’ (1b) uses of *para*, but over time there is a decline of the former and a rise of the latter. In 12th – 14th century data, three verbs of directional motion—*ir(se)* ‘go’, *venir(se)* ‘come’, *tornar(se)* ‘return’—constitute 80% of all spatial instances of *para*, as in (1a). We further observe that middle- (or reflexive-) marked *irse* is somewhat (56:44 times) more frequent than unmarked *ir* (whereas with *por*, *irse* is far less frequent than *ir* (3:31)). The co-occurrence of *para* with *se*-marked motion verbs is consonant with allative use. It is apparently cross-linguistically common for allatives cooccurring with ‘go’ verbs to develop purposive meaning, sometimes going on to introduce verbal complements (Rice & Kabata 2007:459). After the 14th century, there is change in the distribution of *para* + NP across spatial (allative) and abstract (e.g., benefactive) uses such that the proportion of spatial uses drops from 40-50% in the early texts to no greater than 10% (while for *por*, spatial uses remain stable, constituting 10% to 30% of all *por* + NP tokens, indicating that the drop for *para* is not an artifact of genre, topic or some other extra-grammatical consideration).

After this decline of spatial *para* + NP uses, a second change is that the purposive infinitive construction becomes more associated with *para* over time. We register a reversal in the relative frequency of *por* and *para*, which are evenly distributed in [+ INFINITIVE] constructions until the 17th century, after which the rate of *para* increases, reaching 85% in the 20th century. Counting as purposives those instances in which the infinitival situation is posterior to that of the finite verb, as in (1b), we verify that the reversal in the rate of *para* relative to *por* includes purposive [+ INFINITIVE] constructions, even those in which the subject has a human referent (2).

- (2) a. *querría quedar por aliviar tu cuytado* [15th c., *Celestina*, 2.132]
‘I would like to stay **to** alleviate your pain’
b. *quería vencerla, para no padecer tanto* [19th c., *Regenta*, 2.22]
‘he wanted to defeat it [ambition], so as **to** not suffer so much’

We can make a strong case that *para* arises from the combination of two separate prepositions, one of which was *a*, based on the semantic measure of compositionality of meaning, operationalized by the contexts of use of *para*. In spatial uses of *para* + NP, when we consider the proportions of prepositional objects that are persons, not places, we find that, in 13th-14th century texts, NPs with a human referent as the endpoint of motion, as in (3), are at 35%, but such uses disappear from the corpus after the 16th c. (Figure 1).

- (3) *E el moço se fue **para** su padre, e dixo la respuesta* [14th c. Zifar, 21]
 ‘And the boy went **to** his father and told him the answer’

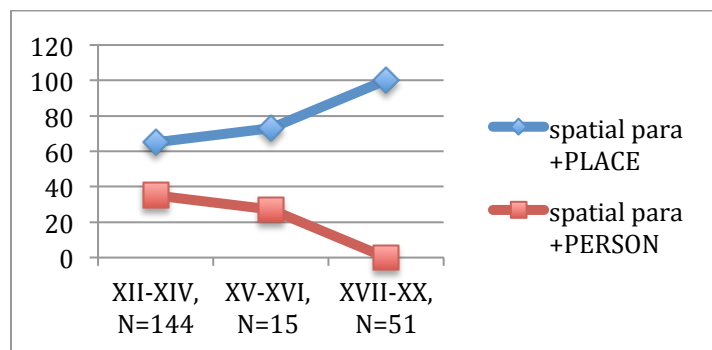


Fig. 1. Spatial uses of *para* + NP: proportion of NPs designating persons vs. places

In this early [MOTION VERB + *para* + PERSON] construction, the human referent of the object appeared as a personal pronoun, proper noun, or definite full NP, and nearly always in singular number. From this we infer that the referent is specific and individuated, precisely the kind of referent we would expect the preposition *a* to occur with, in accordance with its use as a dative marker and progressively also as an accusative marker for direct objects referring to persons. This early [MOTION VERB + *para* + PERSON] construction indicates that the semantic contribution of the preposition *a* was still discernible in the new preposition, and thus greater compositionality in its beginnings. Subsequently, object NPs with a human referent as the endpoint of motion disappear with *para*, which indicates that *a* no longer makes an independent meaning contribution. This is a measure of loss of compositionality, as *a* is completely absorbed into the chunked preposition.

In summary, the evidence adduced for allative > purposive grammaticalization is first, the decline of spatial uses as a proportion of *para* tokens, which includes the disappearance of destinations that are persons, and second, the increasing rate of *para* relative to *por* within purposive infinitive constructions. The findings suit a view of reanalysis as the outcome of gradual loss of compositionality, which, in usage-based theory, is a consequence of the chunking, or fusion, of frequent strings (Bybee 2010:34).

References

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