METAPHORICAL EXPRESSIONS WITH *PRIN*

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Abstract: *The development of cognitive linguistics in the last three decades showed the possibility of analyzing metaphors from a new angle. This paper presents Romanian metaphorical expressions containing prin based on Dicţionarul explicativ al limbii române (DEX, Romanian Explanatory Dictionary). The introduction makes a presentation of how* prin *has been described so far, including its central sense(s); this is followed by the metaphorical cases involving prin. The conclusion summarizes our approach and sets further possibilities. The cognitive-semantic analysis offers a network of interrelated senses deriving from the central meaning of the word.*

Key words: *prin, cognitive linguistics, metaphorical expressions, obstacle, aperture.*

1. Introduction

The Romanian preposition *prin* is a combination of two prepositions: *pe*, which refers to impreciseness (Vasiliu 1961), and *în*, referring to inherence. However, this impreciseness is questionable, as in my view it simply indicates an entity having a surface upon which the contact is observed, or the positioning of the route. Orientation within the entity or space is stereotypically direct (that is, the shortest possible way: *through*), but this is not always the case. The entity or space the object comes into contact with is perceived as an obstacle which is successfully penetrated, and in some cases the exit also takes place either through the shortest possible route or after 'pervading' the entity or space. Nevertheless, with static verbs, the preposition only refers to the inner borders of the entity, without penetration from the outside, but indicating an intrinsic presence:

(1) *Trece **prin** camere cu uşurinţă.* [He goes **through** the rooms easily.]

(2) *Stă **prin** casă toată ziua!* [Hei s staying/sitting (somewhere) in the house all day long.]

Further meanings can be associated with particular meanings of verbs and nouns, and these usages of the preposition enrich its basic meanings, as described in Vasiliu's 1973 article. Thus, movement can be oriented or not (*iese* 'goes out', *dansează* 'dances'), may suggest penetration or interiority (*trece* 'passes', *călăreşte* 'rides'), may take place with or without contact between the static and the moving objects (when *prin* is realized without penetration), and it may be important that there are no limits in any case (in the sense that it lacks precision concerning the origin or the end point of the trajectory).

Dominte (1970:238) mentions approximation within an unlimited space, where static verbs play an important role, whereas prepositions combined with action verbs refer to the route, the itinerary:

(3) *Cochiliile erau risipite **prin** nisip.* [The shells were scattered **all over** the sand.]
(4) *A trecut **prin** oraş.* [He passed **through** the town.]

Whereas *prin* indicates a continuous space or entity, the above-mentioned authors agree that *printre* mainly differs from *prin* in that the route is through a discontinuous entity or space. The combination of *pe* ('on') and *între* ('among') in a single preposition results in **approximation** (Dominte 1970) when the verbs indicate state or position, or an itinerary with action verbs:

(5) *Casele erau împrăştiate **printre** dealuri.* (Dominte) [The houses were straggling **among** the hills]

(6) *A fugit **printre** paznici.* (Dominte) [He ran **through** the guards.]

Temporal situations regarding *prin* are also discussed by Dominte (1970), but I will not present them here. Dominte attributes these cases to the 'auxiliary senses' of *pe*, and correctly observes that in fact they introduce the **instrumental** sense of the combined preposition *prin*, which are already metaphorical extensions. He differentiates between two categories of prepositions, namely principal and auxiliary ones, where the first type refers to strict spatial-temporal relationships, and the second category includes other possible meanings (other aspects, circumstances, where the sense slowly slips into abstract meanings). Dominte's conclusion is that *prin* and *peste* are diachronically compound prepositions, and throughout time they have acquired separate meanings, so they should be treated as individual, simple, polysemantic prepositions, which are nevertheless close to the spatial-temporal relationships. Thus, his conclusion can be interpreted in the cognitive framework (cf. Langacker 1987, Lakoff 1987, Lakoff and Johnson 1980) as *trajectory (S), landmark (C), path* (in one case this includes penetration from the outside and/or from the inside too, in the other case it is within the borders of the obstacle). So one type of *prin* refers to (initial) penetration, going through the obstacle (oriented or non-oriented route), and sometimes (final) penetration, whereas another type of *prin* refers to the intrinsic presence within the borders of an object with or without movement (depending on the combination with an active or a static verb). The former case may be identified with the first three meanings of the preposition, discussed below, whereas the latter is obvious in the meanings 4 and 5; these are completed with further meanings as well. The dictionary definitions (DEX 1998) distinguish nine senses of *prin*, mixing both basic and metaphoric meanings, mentioning both the instrumental and the proximity sense.

2. Spatial meanings

According to Vasiliu (1961:18), covering the distance within a continuous entity can be regarded as the literal meaning of the preposition *prin*, which can refer to going through a particular border as well. A further concrete meaning is the indication of the approximate interior of an object or space. However, Vasiliu (1961:29) correctly observes that covering the distance does not imply a precise delimitation of the space traversed. We can distinguish an entering, piercing, penetrating action combined with the 'going-through' movement. Vasiliu highlights that we need a continuous entity, and there is no exit from it. However, I think that in many cases there is an exit, which comes to complete, finalize the action itself, as in the examples below:

(7) *Oamenii trec pe jos **prin** centrul oraşului.* [People walk **through** the centre of the town.]
(8) *Patinează **prin** sală.* [He is skating **through** the room.]
(9) *A trecut **prin** cartierul nostru.* [He went **through** our neighbourhood.]

After searching the most important senses listed in the dictionary, I will try to present the metaphorical extensions based on the literal meanings and the findings of Vasiliu (1961, 1973), Dominte (1970) and Cuniţă (1999). The examples which illustrate the particular cases have either been found in the dictionary (DEX), or they belong to the cited authors, in which case their name will be added in brackets.

2.1. PRIN 1, 'through obstacle'

In this case, the prototypical participants are the moving object (S), the static object which functions as an obstacle (C); the meaning of the verb contributes a lot to the metaphorical meaning (M):

(10) *Eroul trece **prin** foc şi sabie.* [The hero goes **through** thick and thin.]
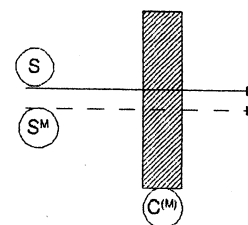
(11) *Îi iese **prin** piele.* [It comes out (of him) **through** his skin. = He is fed up with it]

The sentences can have both a literal and a figurative meaning, as the combination of the participants permits it; we tend to call these cases *weak metaphorical expressions*, whereas the examples below get farther from a literal interpretation:

(12) *Trage gologanul **prin** barbă.* [He is pulling the farthing **through** his beard. = He is stingy.]
(13) *Îl trece **prin** toate apele.* [She is dragging him **through** all waters. = 'giving him a hard time']

The obstacle may be either a horizontally or a vertically extended object, but sometimes there are cases when this is irrelevant, as in (14):

(14) *Îi trec mulţi bani prin mâini.* [A lot of money goes **through** his hands.]

It is my firm belief that we have to separate those cases when S goes through C by penetrating it, from those cases when S goes through an aperture in C. If we are to interpret the entire case, the result is the same when the action is over: S is on the other side of C, either through C or through the aperture in C.

2.2. PRIN 2, 'through aperture'

Languages contain words that denote specific obstacles which refer to either an aperture in an object (e.g. *a ring*), or a set of apertures (e.g. *a sieve*). These apertures are usually perceived as vertical, but there are some cases when we can identify a clearly horizontally extended aperture (e.g. *a tunnel*). Our examples below will present single and multiple apertures, which are either horizontally extended or not:

(15) *A scăpat ca prin urechile acului.* (single aperture, not extended) [He escaped as if **through** the eye of the needle. = 'He had a narrow escape'.]

(16) *A reuşit printr-un tub subţire.* (single aperture, extended) [He made it **through** a narrow tube.]

(17) *A dat prin ciur şi dârmon.* (multiple aperture, not extended) [He has passed **through** the mill. = He has seen a lot in his time.]

In these cases the direction of the moving object is straight (i.e. the shortest possible way through the aperture(s), after which this line is kept, but there is a special case, which blurs this straight vision, and offers *a different perspective*:

(18) *Să ne uităm prin prisma inculpatului.* [Let us take a look **through** the prism/from the angle of the accused.]
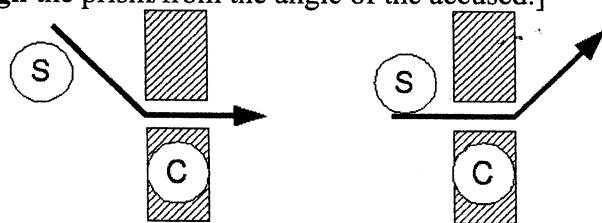
It is clear that the prism offers a certain type of aperture, a unique one, as the direction of the impetus is changed. Our last example highlights the close relationship between *prin* and *printre*:

(19) *Arată trasă (ca) prin(tr-un) inel.* [She looks as if pulled **through** a ring. = 'She looks willowy / slender'.]

2.3. PRIN 3, 'create aperture'

While *prin1* does not change C, *prin3* changes the nature of C, as an aperture is created in C after the contact between S and C. The Romanian examples abound in cases when *inimă* 'heart' is involved as C; in these cases S can be an iron rod (glowing red) or a knife, if the metaphoric expression is connected to pain, grief, sorrow, or suffering; when S is an icicle, then the expression is connected to extreme fear:

(20) *A simţit ca şi cum i-ar fi trecut un fier roşu prin inimă.* [He felt as if a hot iron rod had gone **through** his heart.]

(21) *Văzând fiara, i-a trecut un sloi de gheaţă prin inimă.* [Seeing the beast, an icicle went **through** his heart.]

In these cases, the aperture either remains for ever or leaves a mark. However, there are instances when the aperture may be perceived as *temporary*, as after S goes through it, C is restored to its initial position:

(22) *A intrat prin uşa din dos.* [He went in **through** the back-door.]

(23) *A scăpat prin uşa din dos.* [He escaped through the back-door.]

Here S enters or exits C through a potential aperture, which opens for a short period of time. It is important to mention that these examples seem to contradict Vasiliu, who states that the central sense of *prin* indicates the approximate interior of an object or space without exit. The meaning of the verb makes it clear whether one deals with an entrance or an exit.

2.4. PRIN 4, 'inside'

Prin 4 is regarded as one of the two central senses according to Vasiliu (1961). The prototypical image contains a closed space (C), and within the borders of C, there is an S

which may be static or in motion. In the metaphorical expressions S is typically in motion:

> (24) *Se plimbă ca vodă **prin** lobodă.* [He is walking like a prince **through** the orach. = 'He is peacocking about / swaggering along careleassly.']
> (25) *Îi umblă vorba **prin** gură.* [His words are moving all over his mouth. = 'He speaks a lot.']
> Nevertheless, static verbs may also be associated with *prin 4*:
> (26) *E sărăcie prin toată țara.* [There is poverty all over the country.]
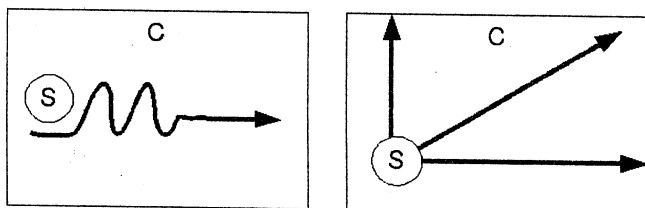
The illustrations above show Vasiliu's idea, according to which this meaning of *prin* reflects an intrinsic presence within borders, with motion. When there is no motion within borders, then S may be imagined either as a widespread object or as a set of scattered items.

2.5. PRIN 5, 'through inside'

We tend to think that this meaning is the result of a combination of *prin1* and *prin4*, as we can identify an initial penetration (S entering C), then a movement inside C, usually form one end to the other:

> (27) *I-a trăsnit **prin** minte că ea a avut dreptate.* [It struck **through** his mind that she was right.]
> (28) *Îi treceau multe gânduri **prin** cap.* [Many thoughts went **through** his head. = 'Many thoughts crossed his mind.']
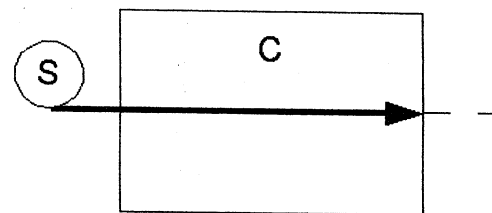
Here ideas may be interpreted as moving objects that go through the head or mind, which function as obstacles; sometimes ideas remain, but they may as well leave:

> (29) *An idea flashed **across/through** his mind.*

Kövecses (2002:74) describes IDEAS in terms of FOOD, but also as OBJECTS (2002:73). There are other cases regarding IDEAS which seem to be forced when trying to apply Kövecses' approach (e.g. *Ideas pervade the mind.*), but let us turn to another interesting use of *prin*.

2.6. PRIN 6, instrumental

Dominte (1970) discusses the next two types of *prin*; one of them refers to the so-called instrumental sense, which is fully metaphorical. In this case the meaning of *prin* is connected to *from, via, by, by means of*, and the *through*-element is in the background, although we can set up a similar schema to *prin1*, where the object preceded by *prin* functions as the obstacle and the object before *prin* represents S:

> (30) *Se răspândește **prin** viu grai.* [It spreads **by** word of mouth.]
> (31) *A obținut-o **prin** contrabandă.* [He obtained it **through/by** smuggling. = 'He obtained it illegally.']
> (32) *A avansat **prin** relațiile sale.* [He was promoted **due to** his connections.]
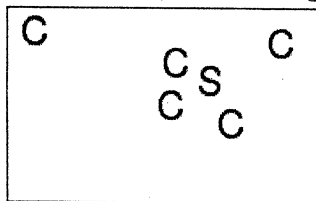> (33) *Au fost luați **prin** surprindere.* [They were taken **by** surprise.]

2.7. PRIN 7, proximity

This *prin*-sense is connected to proximity or approximation within an unlimited space (Dominte 1970:238); in Dominte's view, static verbs are often associated with this sense:

(34) *Stă prin preajmă.* [He lives **nearby / around here**.]
(35) *Locuieşte prin(tre) străini.* [He lives **among** strangers.]

Naturally, the verbs expressing motion refer to the route or itinerary:

(36) *Turcii năvălesc (de) prin toate părţile.* [The Turks are invading **from everywhere**.]

The metaphorical sense of the above sentence derives from the noun phrase containing *prin*, as it probably refers to at least three directions, which offers a somewhat circular interpretation. This leads us to a more convincing circular movement of S around C:

(37) *Se plimbă prin jurul casei.* [He is walking **around** the house.]
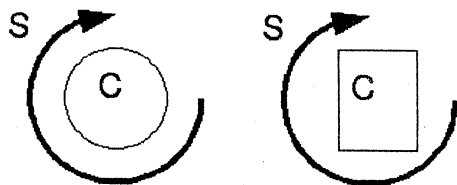
The cases described so far (*prin1* to *prin7*) may be regarded as the main senses of the preposition (cf. Dominte 1970), as they are connected to space. However, there are other (auxiliary) senses as well, for instance the stock phrases: *prin rotaţie* ('by turns'), *prin urmare* ('therefore', 'consequently').
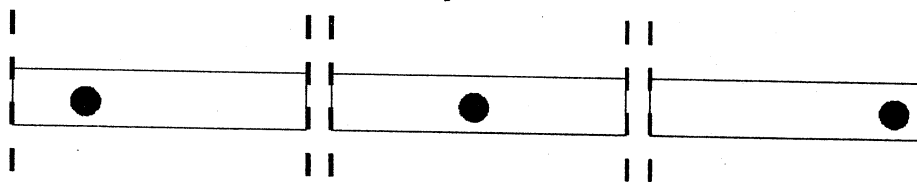
3. Temporal meaning
3.1. PRIN 8

Prin can also appear in temporal phrases, and, according to the dictionary, it refers only vaguely to a period of time:

(38) *Se vor căsători prin luna mai.* [They will get married (*some time*) **around/in** May.]
(39) *Planurile au fost concepute undeva prin 1995.* [The plans were drawn (**some time**) in 1995.]

In the sentences above, *prin* indicates a shorter period of time within a larger one, but this is not clearly delineated: *May* (i.e., 31 days) and *1995* (i.e., 365 days) represent the maximum length of time when the action could have happened; the event could have occurred anywhere in-between the virtual boundaries highlighted by the dashed vertical lines, thus reminding us the previous case when *prin* referred to proximity in space. Spatial and temporal proximity may strengthen the idea that the analysis of *prin* must include both meanings in close connection.

4. Conclusion

Romanian *prin* is a complex preposition, which comes close to English *through* in many respects, denoting, for instance, penetration through an obstacle, covering a distance within the borders of an object, an optional exit from the object, or having an instrumental sense. Regarding Vasiliu's (1961, 1973) about *prin*, I challenge the sharp distinction that she makes between action verbs referring only to penetration and static verbs expressing only intrinsic presence. The

distinction between obstacle and aperture seems to be important both from the point of view of speed and the nature of C after the contact with S (C with a temporary or a final aperture).

Furthermore, I have to add that not only 'enter'-cases can be identified regarding *prin*, but 'exit'-cases as well, similarly to the English cases. The Romanian *printre* ('through', 'among'), which can be a synonym for all *prin*-senses except the instrumental one, is not discussed in details here. Future research regarding *prin* will include its occurrence in the media and everyday use, as the table below suggests, it is one of the most used words in Romanian:

care [which]	125810
face [do]	89444
vrea [want]	77541
mult [a lot]	72130
este [is]	71352
sunt [am]	61396
pentru [for]	61140
putea [can]	53157
frumos [beautiful]	51846
prin* [through]	49966
RO-EN	**18.03.09**

The first column lists the ten most searched Romanian words in an online Romanian-English dictionary, whereas the second column their frequency up to 18th March 2009. The table also highlights the importance of identifying the various *prin* senses, which is of real help in translation. The figure below presents a possible network of interrelated *prin*-senses:

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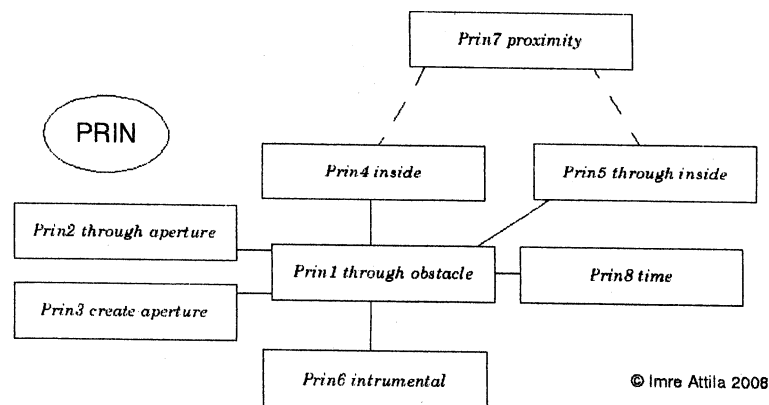
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