

THE ABOVE-OVER MEANINGS OF THE ROMANIAN *DEASUPRA*

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Abstract

The paper presents the *above-over* meanings of the Romanian *deasupra* from a cognitive point of view, based on almost 1,000 cases deriving from various press cuttings and both printed and online mono- and bilingual dictionaries. The conclusion contains a possible network of *deasupra*-senses based on all the detected *above-over* meanings.

Keywords: *deasupra*, central meaning, network of senses, preposition

Introduction

The most important function of a preposition is to establish connection (GALR 2005 I: 607), and as such, it is part of a structure with three elements, being placed between two autonomous lexical terms. It is the “centre” of the term that follows the preposition (GALR 2005 I: 613), as we can observe a certain restriction regarding the term. For instance, in the case of *deasupra* (over / above), the term following the preposition is always in the genitive case due to the nature of the preposition.

Although *deasupra* is not listed among the most important Romanian prepositions (GA 1966 I: 334), it is part of the Romanian *over / above* concept, similarly to *asupra* or *peste*. *Deasupra* is the combination of *de* and *asupra*, and in the present-day Romanian the form of the preposition and adverb coincides (GALR 2005 I: 586); its function may be differentiated only based on the context (GA 1966 I: 319, 329):

(1) *Stau deasupra*. They live above us.

(2) *Am văzut o fotografie deasupra patului*. I have seen a photo above the bed.

Syntactically, a preposition asks for the presence of the associated term (GALR 2005 I: 585), so *deasupra* is an adverb in (1), whereas it is a preposition in (2), followed by a noun in genitive. We have tried to find the central sense (prototypical sense, cf. Brugman 1981, Lakoff and Johnson 1980) of *deasupra*. Based on GALR (2005 I: 624), the intrinsic sense of *deasupra* is superiority, whereas in the Romanian Explanatory Dictionary (DEX 1998) the central meaning of *deasupra* is primarily defined as establishing a locative relationship between two items, one of which is situated higher than the other in space, either functioning as an adverb or preposition; compared to *prin* (through) and *peste* (over-above), the lower entity's upper surface does not come into contact with the object:

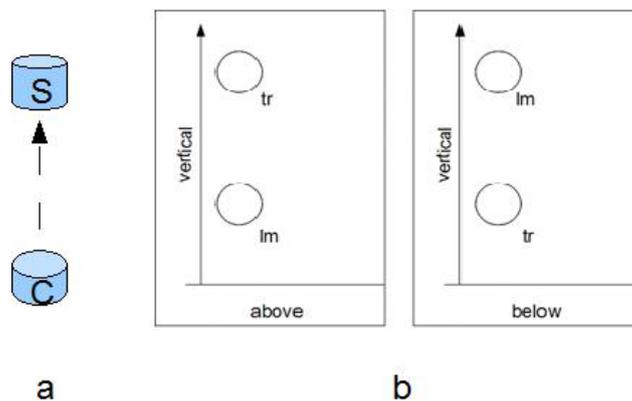


Figure 1. Central *deasupra*

Picture *a* contains *S* (trajectory), which is *above* *C* (landmark). This is in fact similar to Regier's (1996) illustration of the English *above* and *below* in picture *b*, so we may describe this case as *deasupra ABOVE/OVER, 3D no contact* (Imre 2010). Within this category, we could separate cases when *S* and/or *C* are vertically or horizontally extended objects; *S* may also act as a cover above *C* (in this case *S* is at least similar in size with *C*), which in its turn may be even a hole. The human body is viewed as a vertically extended building-like construction, in which various body-parts are situated one above the other, taking into account, of course, Regier's findings regarding the role of context of less clear *above*-situations (1996: 82-87).

Deasupra was often met connected to building parts as well, where the building may be either three- or two-dimensional (picture-like, in which various parts are one above the other, for instance *floors*). Relatively many cases were found when *deasupra* was used to illustrate relationships on a paper, for instance diacritical signs above letters. All these cases indicated a logical upward direction (from *C* towards *S*), but there was a special case when *S* moved from above towards *C*, a case also signalled by Vasiliu (1973), who described it as a synonym for *peste* (over-above).

Although Evans and Green warn us that Rosch's categorisation (cf. Rosch 1977:429) does not rely on scientific categories but the everyday process of categorisation, the human categorisation system is finally constructed by two principles (Evans and Green 2006: 253):

1. cognitive economy: organisms attempt to gain as much information as possible about their environment with minimum cognitive effort and resources;
2. perceived world structure: our world has correlational structure; it is a world in which wings most frequently co-occur with feathers and the ability to fly (as in *birds*), and humans rely upon correlational structure of this kind in order to form and organise categories. Thus in the following we will present the categories for *deasupra* with *above / over* sense.

1.1 *Deasupra* ABOVE, 3D, no contact, horizontally extended C

Seemingly, the most central sense of the Romanian *deasupra* is the following spatial scenario: stereotypically, a smaller thing (*S*) is above a bigger, usually horizontally extended thing (*C*), and there is no contact between the two items. The scenario comes into being by

distancing from the ‘ground’ level, as the landmark (C) of the scenario is below, above which something is to be observed (S):

- (3) *OZN surprins deasupra Aeroportului Henri Coandă*
 UFO seen above Henri Coandă Airport, Romania (headline)

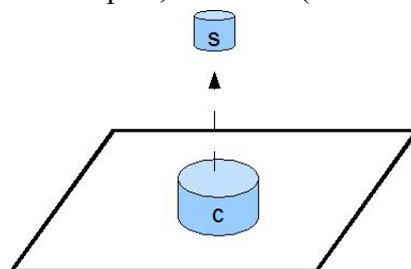


Figure 2. *Deasupra* above, 3D, HC

Another thing to mention here is the fact that both the English *above* and the Romanian *deasupra* are typically regarded as describing static scenes, as if one thing hanging above the other, but the examples show that we are faced with cases which may be either static or dynamic, depending on the verbs involved; a lamp may be static above a table (a famous case of *over*), but an airplane is surely dynamic above / over a city. This remark leads us to the sub-cases we have observed within this category.

Within this framework, *deasupra* describes cases when C may be the ground (level), or something on the ground-level. This is typically a building or a part of a building, but on a larger scale settlements are common to appear: collection buildings, e.g. villages, towns, cities, countries:

- (4) *Cu planorul deasupra Craiovei* Above Craiova by glider (headline)

A partially metaphorized is the following:

- (5) *Spectacol deasupra Timișoarei* Show above Timișoara (headline),

until we reach the largest possible units for C, a continent or a planet:

- (6) *Gaura din stratul de ozon de deasupra Antarcticii...*

The hole in the ozone-layer above the Antarctica...

However, this type of *deasupra* can be observed connected to water(level)s, rivers and oceans as well:

- (7) *Porumbei deasupra Someșului* Doves above Someș river,

and in the air (horizon) as well. The horizon, above which something is to be observed, constitutes a possible way of metaphorization, as it often stands for a virtual level or limit:

- (8) *Punctul cel mai înalt deasupra orizontului atins de un astru pe bolta cerească.*

The uppermost part above the horizon touched by a celestial body...

These concrete, basic meanings are easy to change into metaphorical extensions, we only need one of the constituents to be or to be understood as metaphoric. A typical way of metaphorization is the case when the capital city of a state stands for the whole country / the citizens:

- (9) *Nemții văd nori negri deasupra României*

Germany sees black clouds over Romania (headline)

- (10) *Curcubeu deasupra României* Rainbow over Romania (headline)

1.2 *Deasupra* ABOVE, 3D, no contact

This case is similar to the previous one, but neither C nor S is horizontally extended; in fact, they are separated by either a virtual line corresponding to the very top part of C, or by a certain construction, such as floor-level:

- (11) *Aripa este așezată deasupra roții autovehicolului.*
The wing is fixed above the car's wheel.

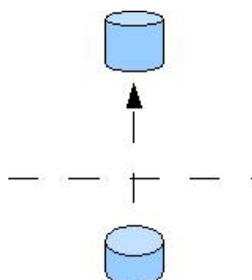


Figure 3. *Deasupra* above, 3D

As we live in buildings with floors, *deasupra* often appears describing this relationship; however, in this case we can mention Regier's findings, who demonstrated that the *above*-situation should not always be fully upright (C–S2), a certain slant is often accepted (C–S1, C–S3) as illustrated below:

- (12) *Vecinii de deasupra noastră.* The neighbours above us.

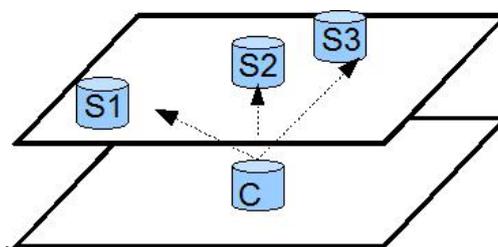


Figure 4. *Deasupra* above slanted

The cases above show that whatever categories one might create, fuzziness is acceptable, and one should not expect clear-cut categories since Rosch's research on prototypes. Our bodily experience often leads to cases of this type, as there are many cases when we can observe something above our head:

- (13) *Ține umbrela deasupra capului.* He is holding an umbrella over his head.

It goes without saying that our head standing for the whole body leads directly to a whole series of metaphorical extensions, and the head represents our life / secure being / existence:

- (14) *Nori negri deasupra capetelor noastre.* Black clouds over our head.

For other body parts involved, see 1.5.

1.3 *Deasupra* ABOVE, 3D, no contact, cover

A different type of *deasupra* is to be observed when S is similar in size to C, or even larger than that; in these cases we can observe a certain cover aspect added to the basic meaning of *deasupra*, and S both covers and protects C without contact:

- (15) *Cerdacul este un acoperiș făcut deasupra unei fântâni sau a unei cruci.*
The well-roofing is fixed above a well or a cross.

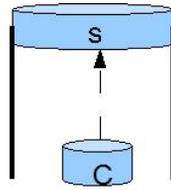


Figure 5. *Deasupra* above, 3D, cover

1.4 *Deasupra* ABOVE, 3D, no contact, over a hole

Our next case is similar to the previous one, except for C, which is in this case a certain type of hole: a well, or the mouth / entrance of a derrick or mine:

- (16) *Turla e amenajată deasupra unei guri de sondă.*
The tower is built above the mouth of an oil-derrick.

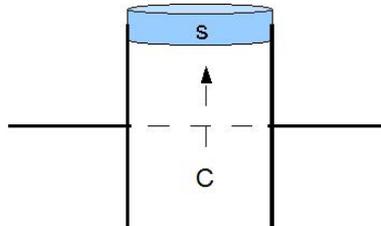


Figure 6. *Deasupra* above, 3D, over a hole

1.5 *Deasupra* ABOVE body parts, no contact

Chomsky correctly observes that even the notion of *body* should be revised:

Without pursuing subsequent developments further, the general conclusion is that the Cartesian concept of body was found to be untenable. What is the concept of body that finally emerged? The answer is that there is no clear and definite concept of *body*. If the best theory of the material world that we can construct includes a variety of forces, particles that have no mass, and other entities that would have been offensive to the "scientific common sense" of the Cartesians, then so be it: We conclude that these are properties of the physical world, the world of body... There is no longer any definite conception of *body*." (1988)

Chomsky's argument is that the concept of body used by Descartes was replaced by the Newtonian notion of body, which was altered due to the research in particle physics. Thus our present-day notion of *body* is "ill defined because we have no clear conception of what the body is...and our understanding of the physical body will have to change to accommodate the mental." (Beakley and Ludlow 1992: 4)

A possible reply to Chomsky may be found in Evans and Green (2006: 232-3), when they describe the lexical concept BODY. They say that this is understood more generally in terms of (three-dimensional) SPACE, as SPACE is a domain that derives directly from our sensory experience of the world. Langacker states that basic domains derive from directly embodied experiences that are pre-conceptual in nature, and subjective experiences and

sensory-perceptual experiences are both directly embodied in pre-conceptual experiences. Thus the notion of *body* is connected to physical experience which leads to pre-concepts and ultimately to concepts.

As our entire physical being relies heavily on our bodily experience, it is natural to have come across many instances of *deasupra* related to the human body and its parts. The picture below illustrates those body parts, which were most often met; the first number refers to a particular body part (1 eyes; 2 upper lip; 3 lower lip; 4 kidneys; 5 hip/waist; 6 knees; 7 ankle; 8 foot/feet), whereas the number after the slash refers to the number of instances found; body parts with less than 4 occurrences are not listed:

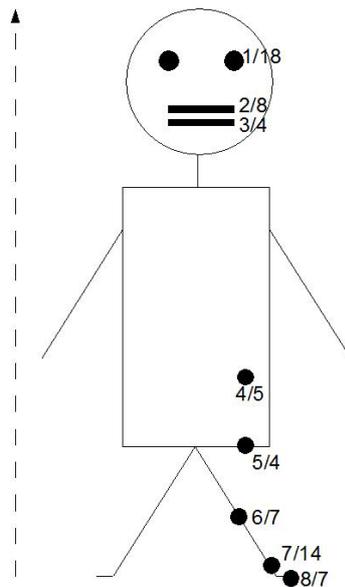


Figure 7. *Deasupra* body parts

Our body exists in space, and we tend to think that – from the point of view of *deasupra* –, it is easy to perceive it as a vertically extended building. The majority of sentences containing the above-mentioned body parts referred to other body parts situated above these ones:

- (17) *Mușchii coloanei vertebrale deasupra rinichilor...*
The muscles of the spine above the kidneys...

1.6 *Deasupra* ABOVE building parts, 3D/2D, no contact

In many cases *deasupra* establishes a relationship between various parts of a building:

- (18) *Arhivolta e un detaliu ornamental deasupra unei ferestre.*
The archivolt is an ornamental molding above the window.

The most likely elements of a building to occur are the entrance and windows, above which something is placed. In these cases we can talk about a relationship, which is three-dimensional in space, but we can also mention a so-called ‘perspectival’ approach establishing a viewpoint from which participants of a scene are viewed (cf. Evans and Green 2006: 528). Thus we can say that a certain two-dimensional view is to be observed: the entire building is vertically extended, but we are only interested in one of its side, namely where the particular entrance or window is situated above which there is something:

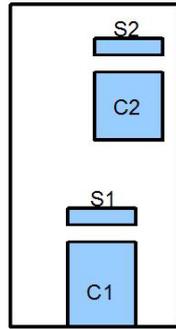


Figure 8. *Deasupra* above building parts

The importance of a canonically viewed perspective means that S1 and S2 are related to C1 and C2, and not vice versa, as figure stands out of the ground. This figure / ground alignment explains why we are not willing to say that ‘*The door / window is under the archivolt.*’ (cf. ‘*The blanket is over the cat*’, Langacker 1987: 141). Langacker also adds (1999: 185), that the canonical perception is side-viewed, distant enough in order to comprise the whole schema, in our case *deasupra*, in few cases being top-viewed; individuals may also serve as conceptual reference points with respect to which processes can be situated. Moreover, the reference point comes to be combined with further (somewhat implicit elements, such as bigger mass is more important than smaller mass); for instance, if the lamp is over the table, then we could also say that the table is below the lamp, but the reference point (speaker involved in a side-view situation) is combined with canonical perception (lower objects more basic, that is more likely to serve as source domains than higher ones).

1.7 *Deasupra* ABOVE on paper, no contact

Many instances of *deasupra* were identified related to things written on paper: mainly diacritical signs, accent marks above letters, or notes on music sheets:

- (19) *Fermatele sunt semne puse deasupra sau dedesubtul notelor sau pauzelor (muzicale).* Fermatas are written either above or below (musical) notes or pauses.

In fact even the lines are situated one above or below the other, the final choice of the correct preposition depending on the reference point. The sentence also signals that the cognitive map of *deasupra* also includes *dedesubt*, which essentially differs only in point of view (reference) from *deasupra*. Vocabulary-building exercises seem to implement this fact.

1.8 *Deasupra* ABOVE/OVER, horizontally extended C and S

In these cases both C and S are horizontally extended, and S can be either shorter or as long as C:

- (20) *La kantele coardele sunt întinse deasupra unei mici cutii de rezonanță.*
The strings of the kantele stretch over a small resonance box.

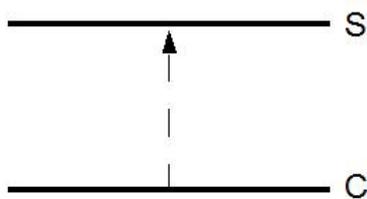


Figure 9. *Deasupra* above / over HC, HS

A very interesting case is when the canonical viewpoint shifts to a vertical one, and the observer ‘knows’ that S is above C; in this case we can talk about a 90° turn, but the relationship between C and S is still *deasupra*, and an extra cover aspect becomes important:

- (21) *Draperia e pusă deasupra unei ferestre.*
The curtain is hung in a position overlying a window.

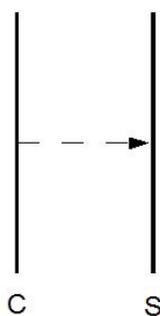


Figure 10. *Deasupra* (c)over window

In the side-viewed picture above, C stands for the window and S is the curtain covering the window; typically, there is no contact between the two. This is similar to body parts and their covering clothes, but they are treated separately, as there is contact between them.

1.9 *Deasupra* ABOVE/OVER, downward

In the cases presented so far we could observe a certain upward motion from C to S, but we could identify a special situation when this movement changes and the initial distance between C and S is shortened while S is getting closer to C:

- (22) *S-a aplecat deasupra bebeluşului.* She bent over the baby.

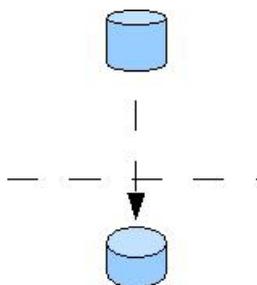


Figure 11. *Deasupra* downward

Conclusions

Dominte (1970: 254) does not describe *deasupra* in terms of contact or lack of contact, and in his opinion its analysis is impossible. From a cognitive point of view, we can say that we have identified cases of *deasupra* describing a relationship between two items (C and S); these were canonically front- or side-viewed, and the scenario comes into being by distancing from C towards S, except for the last case. Both C and S can be horizontally and / or vertically extended, and there are cases when the participants are either 2 or 3-dimensional. Typically, body parts are often implied as well as building parts; particular cases imply a cavity-type C, cover aspect, or when the *deasupra*-situation comes into being on paper. The unifying characteristic is that there is no contact between S and C.

However, we are far from having identified all the *deasupra*-cases. For instance, another interesting case is when *fire* is involved:

(23) *Se rotește carnea deasupra focului.* The roast rotates on a spit over the fire.

Although this seems to be a standard case, a good question is whether there is contact between C (spit) and S (roast). We tend to think that this case establishes the link between *above with no contact* and *above with contact* cases, as the fire may touch the roast occasionally, proving the fuzziness of categories.

A further issue involves synonymy and translation. Language learners may have difficulties in choosing the proper preposition when they are partially synonymous; in order to pick the correct one, the context may be of help:

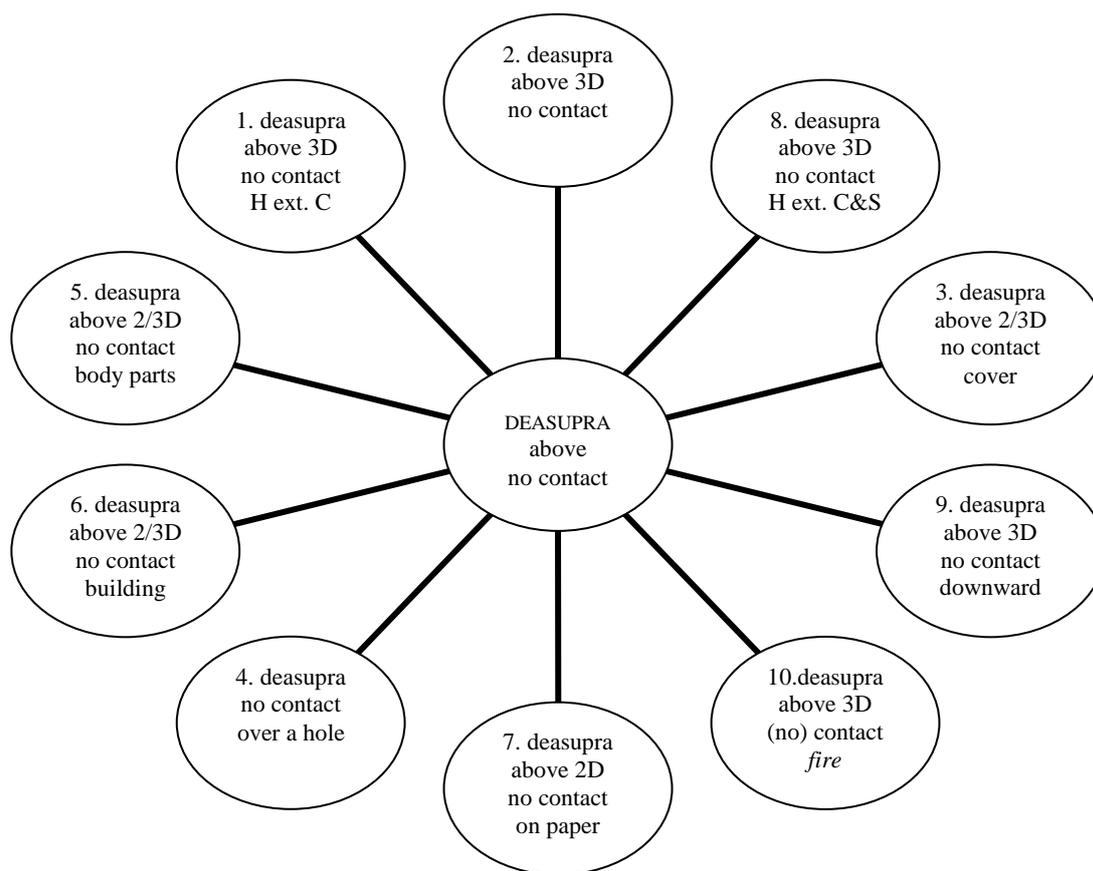
(24) *Fetița s-a aplecat deasupra pianului.* The girl bent over the piano.

(25) *S-a aplecat asupra lui și a văzut că...* He bent over him and saw that...

(26) *S-a aplecat peste el.* He bent over him (to reach something).

While the prepositions in (24) and (25) are synonyms, (26) differs in meaning. When *deasupra* is to be translated into English, both *over* and *above* may be used, but they are not always synonyms, for instance (17) and (21). However, the English *above* is defined as static, whereas *over* is dynamic (cf. Brugman 1981, Lakoff and Johnson 1980, etc.).

Other cases of *deasupra* will involve *contact*, which means that S is *on* C. *Deasupra* may also refer to an object with an upper and lower part (C_a and C_b in case of *turn*, or C_1 and C_2 in case of *split*), or when S is above a certain *limit*, but this is already the topic of a further study. To sum up, the illustration below shows the senses of *deasupra above / over* described so far:



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