METAPHORICAL EXPRESSIONS WITH *PESTE*

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Abstract

The article describes the Romanian "peste" from the point of view of cognitive linguistics, using the metaphorical expressions containing "peste" based on "Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române" (Romanian Explanatory Dictionary). The introductory part presents metaphors and prepositions in general; then the central (prototypical) meaning of "peste" is described considering the findings of Romanian authors from the 1970s up to the 1990s, which is followed by the four metaphorical cases in which "peste" was detected based on the corpus.

1. Introduction

1.1 Metaphors and prepositions

Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999) regarded metaphors as conceptual, as many of the ways in which we think and act are basically metaphorical (cf. Evans and Green 2006:44). Basically, this led to the conclusion that human experience deriving from the human body is more important than the formal and computational system (distance from Descartes' view). Brugman, starting from Rosch's findings, revolutionized the study of metaphors (1981). Ever since cognitive linguists have been arguing that metaphor is central to human language (cf. Evans and Green 2006). The central idea is that metaphors (metaphorical expressions) are based on our physical experience, so the comprehension of figurative language is dependent on the literal understanding of the words used (cf. Moran 1997). According to this view, most ordinary language is literal. However, on closer inspection, much of our ordinary everyday language turns out to be figurative in nature (Evans and Green 2006:287). Gibbs (1994:75) observes that certain concepts are impossible to describe non-metaphorically, for instance TIME without recourse to SPACE and MOTION is hard to describe. Gentner and Bowdle's experiment (2001) presented by Hasson and Giora (2007:312) reveals an important difference between metaphors and similes: when the sources are novel, similes can be faster understood than metaphors, but when we face conventionalized sources, the understanding of metaphors is faster. These findings are completed by Kövecses's preface (2002) where the author contradicts that one must have a special talent to be able to use metaphors; in fact, it is used

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effortlessly in everyday life by ordinary people, as it is an inevitable process of human thought and reasoning. Now let us turn to prepositions.

The definition of prepositions is usually connected to their position within a phrase; they are typically 'satellites' to nouns (Talmy 2000), and their name differs according to their location: if they are before a noun, they are *pre*positions, if they follow a noun or verb they are referred to *post*positions. *Ad*position coins both types. Within a Romanian framework Vasiliu (1961:11-14) brought into the limelight the first emerging problem connected to prepositions, namely that their description is difficult in the traditional grammar, as they are not treated individually lexically. She is supported by Benveniste (1949) and Gougenheim (1959), reaching the conclusion that prepositions were neglected; they were viewed under the meanings of the words they were usually attached to (e.g. nouns). Nevertheless, prepositions do have their own meaning and basic functions, which can serve as a starting point for all the meanings and secondary functions. Our investigation takes into account that prepositions never occur alone (Vasiliu 1961:13), but in a set of at least three items, for instance verb-preposition-noun. Thus the intrinsic value of the prepositions cannot be separated from the syntagms in which they appear, as the contents of the verb and noun may determine the different meanings of the preposition. From the cognitive point of view, we can say that it is exactly the 'neighbourhood' of the prepositions that can also help us make the difference between literal and figurative meanings. Cognitive semantics does take into consideration cases where prepositions are inserted in syntagms, starting from prototypical, central, obvious meanings, reaching to special cases, where the roots are less obvious. Evans and Green (2006:36) remind us that polysemy is not restricted to word meaning but is a fundamental feature of human language.

Lakoff (1987) describes *over* (based on Langacker) in terms of 'landmark' (LM) and 'trajector' (TR). To our great relief, within this system we can concentrate on the occurrence of words irrespective of their syntactic background. Moreover, Kovács (2005:4) offers a comforting explanation: although the various senses of *over* (for instance) may seem totally unrelated, and its combination with verbs and nouns seems to be arbitrary, cognitive grammarians were able to analyse them to some degree. The relationship within the structure is much more important in the case of prepositions, even if they are sometimes adverbs. Regarding the Romanian *peste,* we searched for any nouns and verbs that might contain it, and the specific entries of the prepositions involved (*Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române*, DEX 1998). A cognitive analysis of the prepositions necessarily deals with spatial relations,

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as it is a well-known fact that metaphors have at their root a concrete, literal meaning, often described in terms of space and time. What we found interesting that articles written in Romanian more than three decades ago can be considered as the forerunners of cognitive grammar in Romania, as Dominte (1970), and Vasiliu (1973) describe prepositions in terms of cognitive approach, although Rosch's prototype theory (cf. Lakoff 1980) became widespread after that. Dominte (1970) mentions main and secondary prepositions in space and time, stating that in space we have position (state) and movement, whereas in time we have moment and period (length), adding that constructions with time follow the model of spatial ones, never vice versa (1970:233). Nowadays it goes without saying that the study of metaphors from a cognitive point of view confirmed and explained why this phenomenon can happen, and a whole system includes the exact description of space and its components (*LM, TR, source, path, goal* in Lakoff 1980, Radden 1994 and others).

The metaphorical extensions will be described with a particular system of abbreviations. In the cases regarding the Romanian *peste* there are two basic types of objects: moving one(s) and static one(s). The moving object is marked with **S** (we call it **subject** as it captures our attention by moving, and it constitutes the basic frame of the schema). If we have **S'**, it means that the original **S** is somewhat altered. Sometimes we need $\mathbf{S_1}$ and $\mathbf{S_2}$ to indicate that the original moving object (due to its movement in time or contact with the static object) has radically or completely changed, and if **S** is not superscript, it refers to more or less concrete objects. Conversely, $\mathbf{S^M}$ is to be taken metaphorically. Similarly, we have **C** referring to the static and concrete object (**container**, in the Lakoffian terms), but of course, we do not always have a 'container-like' object, as in the case of *peste* we will have obstacle, impediment, barrier, limit and what not. $\mathbf{C_1}$, $\mathbf{C_2}$ and $\mathbf{C_3}$ usually refer to the movement of **S** from one place to another; $\mathbf{C^M}$ indicates that the object is metaphoric. The arrow or arrows indicate the direction of the movement; if the line of the arrow is continuous we can perceive a concrete action (i.e., the meaning of the verb is literal), and the dashed/dotted arrow indicates a metaphorical perception. The examples which come to illustrate the particular cases are either the ones found in the dictionary (in which case we usually have the infinitive form of the verb, transformed into a sentence: *a vedea ca prin ciur* will appear as a sentence: *Vede ca prin ciur*.) or they belong to the cited authors, in which case their name is specified. The illustrations are original, unless otherwise specified.

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1.2 Peste

The issues concerning the Romanian *peste* were discussed by Vasiliu (1961, 1973), Dominte (1970) and Cuniță (1999). Before dealing with the metaphorical extensions, it is important to check the dictionary entry for this preposition (DEX 1998), which are presented as follows. As a preposition, it expresses the idea of placing something over something else, thus obtaining an *over/above* sense; the direction may be vertical or horizontal (cover):

*Ploaia cade **peste** noi.* [It is raining **over/on** us. = We are getting wet in the rain.]

*Părul se împrăştie **peste** pernă.* [The hair scatters (**all**) **over** the pillow.]

When objects with surfaces are involved, there is either a kind of covering sense, or covering a distance:

*Aleargă **peste** câmpuri.* [He runs **across** fields.]

It can have a specific *over*-sense, which refers to circular objects (around):

*Stă încinsă **peste** brâu cu un cordon.* [She is girded with a belt/girdle **around** her waist.]

Sometimes its *over/above*-sense can split into a more clear *above*-sense, with no contact and a more emphasised *over*-sense:

*Se apleacă **peste** el.* [She bends **over/above** him.]

*Sare **peste** gard.* [He jumps **over** the fence.]

In temporal expressions it can refer to a length of time, or to an excess regarding a period of time:

***Peste** zi lucrează*. [He works **during** the day.]

*Hai **peste** un ceas*. [Come in **about** an hour.]

*A întârziat **peste** două ceasuri*. [He was late **for more than** 2 hours.]

When it appears in-between two identical nouns, it can have an *over/cover*-sense:

*Pune întrebări **peste** întrebări*. [He asks questions **over** questions. = He keeps asking questions.]

Combined with numerals, it refers to an excess:

***Peste** o mie de oameni au venit la concert*. [**More than/Over** 1,000 people came to the concert.]

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If we take a closer look at the possible senses above and start replacing the constituents of the basic meanings to metaphorical ones, we can also have a picture of the possible cases. Thus we can discuss the metaphorical *peste* expressing *over, above, excess, cover* senses and *peste* referring to *time.* According to Vasiliu (1961), the basic meaning of this preposition is very obvious: one object is above the other in space, and there is a surface contact between them. The upper surface of the lower object plays a major role, as this 'suffers' the contact. As it was previously mentioned, this preposition is a compound one as well, which in present day Romanian is regarded as a simple one. However, as in the case of *prin*, this preposition also preserved the basic meanings of its components, thus we can distinguish a *pe* situation [on] and a *spre* [towards] situation (Cuniță, 1999:53). If the preposition is used with action verbs of orientation, *peste* expresses the direction towards that space, which is an upright one, very often a hovering or a covering one (Vasiliu 1961), the 'altitude' playing an important part:

*A sărit **peste** gard.* [He jumped **over** the fence.]

*A trecut **peste** pod.* [He went **across** the bridge.]

Dominte (1970) includes *peste* in the category of the main prepositions expressing a strict spatial-temporal relationship, stating that prepositions of diachronically compound origins turned simple ones. He derives the abstract meanings from the main senses (e.g. *pe*), which gradually changed, whereas Cuniță's more recent article (1999) splits the main meanings of *peste* into three categories, expressing spatial, temporal and quantitative relations. Moreover, she observes that in some spatial relations there is no contact between S and C, and we can complete her observation with the remark that the lack of contact is *minimal*, that is the moving object seems to preserve a minimal distance in order to avoid contact:

*A aruncat un bulgăre **peste** acoperiș.* [He threw a snowball **over** the roof.]

*A sărit **peste** groapă.* [He jumped **over** the hole.]

If contact is established, especially in combination with verbs indicating movement (*run, pass,*), then *peste* can be translated into English with *across* instead of *over*, and thus we get to Vasiliu's 1961 description. Vasiliu (1973) distinguishes more cases based on various meanings of *peste* combined with the meanings of various verbs and nouns, and reaches the conclusion that the central *peste* contains overlapping, contact, extension in a horizontal plan.

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We can talk about movement as present or missing (*a alerga* to run*, a sta* to stay), and if movement is perceived, then it can be oriented or not, sometimes indicating a final limit:

*A pus cărți **peste** caiete.* [He placed some books **over** the notebooks.]

*A cercetat **peste** tot.* [He searched **all over** the place/house.]

A really valuable observation of Vasiliu from our point of view is when she finds the case when *peste* [over, across] and *deasupra* [above] are interchangeable, and this happens when the noun of the construction is perceived as an obstacle (or limit, borderline). This remark fits into our view when we discussed above the extra effort *peste* needs in cases when bypassing (not touching) the object; this guarantees the successful perception of *peste* as *over/above* and not *across*. Cuniță (1999) also offers outstanding cognitive examples of various concrete perceptions of *peste*, highlighting cases when we have initial and/or final limits, thus *peste* training our mind to build up the whole prototypical frame: '*noun(substitute, usually a pronoun) + verb + peste + noun'*, where any of the satellite elements of *peste* can be missing, but reconstructed with the help of *peste* if necessary.

Consequently, we can say here that the above scheme is the central (prototypical) case of *peste*, where all the elements refer to concrete things and the vertical and horizontal positioning offers either a passing over an obstacle or a covering of a horizontally stretched object. The relationship between the objects also indicates the upward or the downward orientation as in the following (Cuniță 1999) examples:

*Plapuma se întinde **peste** pat.* (downward) [The quilt spreads **all over** the bed. = The quilt covers the bed.]

*Erau cadavre **peste** cadavre.* (upward) [There were corpses one **over** the other(?)/put one on top of the other. = The corpses were piled up.]

2. Metaphorical PESTE

2.1 PESTE1 over-above

The central sense of *peste* is connected to an *over-above* image, and the constituents are the static object (C), the moving object (S), and the relationship between them expressed by the meaning of the verb. This image has more variants, mainly based on the nature of the static object and the meaning of the verb.

2.1.1 PESTE1 over-above V-obstacle no contact

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In this case there is a static object which functions as a vertically extended obstacle, and while S passes C, there is no contact between the two objects. The root of the metaphorical sense is obviously the literal meaning, but here they refer to something else:

*L-a aruncat **peste** bord.* [He threw it **over** board. = He gave up using it.]

A sărit peste gard. [He jumped over the fence. = He exceeded the legal limits.]

A sărit peste garduri. [He jumped over many fences. = He was involved in love-affairs.]

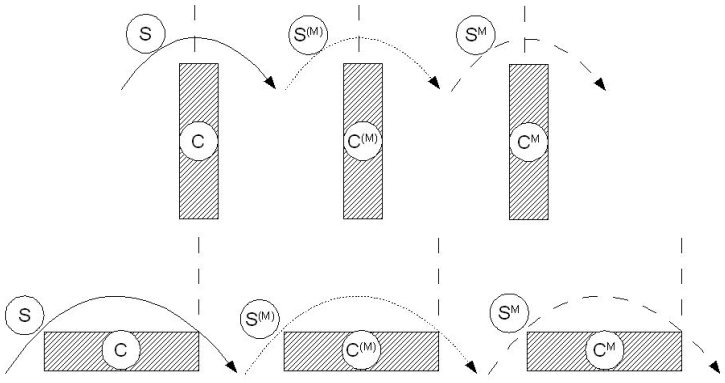


Figure 1. Over-above V no contact

These expressions represent the first level of metaphorisation, but once we use abstract concepts instead of concrete ones, the expressions become more metaphoric:

*A plecat **peste** voia părinților.* [He left **over** his parents' wish. = He left disregarding his parents' wish.]

2.1.2 PESTE1 over-above V-obstacle contact

Peste may express situations in which there is a certain type of contact between S and C, mainly deriving from the nature of C. The example below offers both an *over-above no contact* and an *over-above contact* interpretation:

*Mereu trece **peste** mine.* [He always **over**steps me.]

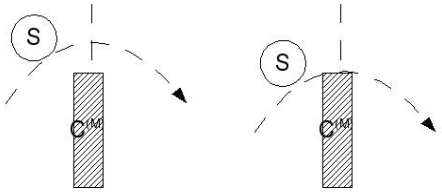


Figure 2. Over-above V contact

In this case the most important event is the moment of passing over the obstacle, although it may also be important for S to get to the *other side*. This aspect becomes much more important when C is a horizontally extended obstacle, as follows.

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2.1.3 PESTE1 over-above H-obstacle no contact

In these metaphorical cases the obstacle is horizontally extended, and it is important for S to exceed the borderline of C. Consequently, *peste* refers to both covering the distance *over-above* C and reaching *beyond* it:

*A venit de **peste** lume.* [He came from the back of **beyond**.]

*A ajuns **peste** (nouă) mări şi (nouă) ţări.* [He got **over** (nine) seas and (nine) countries. = He reached far away/at the back of **beyond**.]

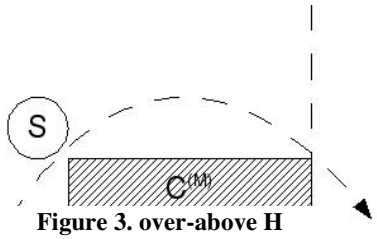


Figure 3. over-above H no contact

This usage of *peste* may be relevant from another angle as well; the first sentence includes the source, whereas the second example contains the goal (although blurry). So we can say that here we can observe a weak *from-to* sense of *peste*, as we cannot clearly identify the source and the goal. This is also to be found in Vasiliu 1973, stating that sometimes there is a final limit, although her example can be regarded as a *PESTE3 cover* case as well:

*A cercetat **peste** tot.* [He searched **all over** (the place/house).]

2.1.4 PESTE1 over-above upward

A rather complex *peste* expression is described by Cuniță (1999), when she identifies the cover of a horizontally extended object combined with an upward movement:

*Erau cadavre **peste** cadavre.* [There were corpses one **over** the other(?)/put one on top of the other. = The corpses were piled up.]

However, this is not a metaphorical case yet, but if we use a verb expressing motion, we can easily obtain a highly metaphorical image, where the cover aspect is either less important or not present:

*A călcat/trecut **peste** cadavre în atingerea scopului.*

[He rode roughshod **over** dead bodies for the sake of the cause.]

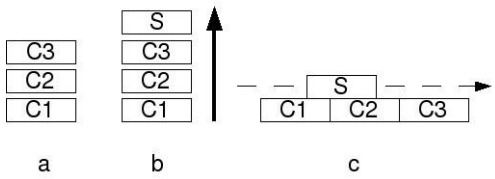


Figure 4. Over-above upward

Cuniță's example is reflected by the first image, whereas the metaphorical cases (*b* and *c*) refer to both an upward movement based on the meaning of the verb and a possible

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upward-horizontal-downward movement, similar to *peste* situations described before, as the meaning of the verb does not clearly show the direction. Another type of upward movement can be observed in the following examples:

*Mereu îşi dă ochii **peste** cap.* [She is always backing her eyes **over** her head. = She is always flirting.]

*A dat paharul **peste** cap.* [He backed the glass **over** his head. = He downed the drink.]

The metaphorical meaning derives from the whole sentence, and the basic expression (*a da peste cap*) can be very rich in interpretation depending on the context:

*A dat toate planurile **peste** cap.* [He changed/destroyed all the plans.]

*L-a dat **peste** cap.* [He defeated/ floored him.]

*S-a dat **peste** cap să-şi termine treaba la timp.*

[He did the impossible to finish his job in time.]

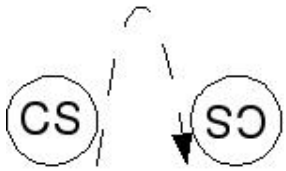


Figure 5. Reflexive *peste*

In the last three cases the upward movement is completed by a similar downward movement, and a closer analysis reveals that we can also label these cases as reflexive. This means that an initially static object is transformed into a moving one by being forced to produce a more or less 180° *turn*, thus *changing* the initial object (cf. the English *over*). Moreover, there are further cases when the Romanian '*peste cap*' refers to something else, but this already leads us to our next type of *peste,* which is a quantitative meaning (cf. Vasiliu 1961, Cuniţă 1999).

2.2 PESTE2 excess

According to Lakoff, the spatial relationships have served as the basis for non-spatial relationships, for instance including qualitative and temporal ones too. In this part we deal with expressions containing *peste* which have an excess sense, and we support the idea that they derive from the *over-above* sense of *peste* presented before. Some expressions are in between spatial and metaphorical sense (*până peste cap*), while others are only metaphorical (*peste aşteptări*). The excess refers to a basically upward movement, and the moving object (S) exceeds a certain limit or level, which in English can be translated into *over, above, across* and *beyond.* The examples found are the following:

*Sunt ocupat până **peste** cap.* [I am busy **over** my head. = I am snowed under with work.]

*Obrăznicia ta e **peste** măsură.* [You are impudent **beyond** measure/limits.]

*Planul tău e **peste** putinţă.* [Your plan is just **above** possible. = It is impossible to carry out your plan.]

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*Ceea ce vrei e **peste** poate.* [What you want is **beyond** possible. = What you want is just not possible.]

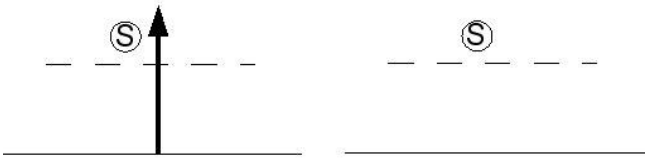


Figure 6. Excess

In the sentences above the limit is expressed by more or less synonymous words (*măsură, putință, poate*), and we can observe that the sentences become more and more metaphoric due to the word following *peste*. If we adapt Vasiliu's term (1973), we can say that there is a final limit in these examples as well, not a horizontal one, but a vertical one, and S gets above it. In this case it is irrelevant whether we have a static or a motion verb involved in the expressions. Other expressions may also belong to this category, for instance the ones containing *numbers*:

***Peste** o mie de soldați au murit în bătălie.* [**Over** a thousand soldiers died in the battle.]

2.3 PESTE3 (partial) cover

The historical background of *peste* is described in both Dominte's (1970) and Cuniță's article (1999:53). According to them, we can distinguish a *pe* (on) and a *spre* (towards) element; the first one leads to a cover aspect of *peste,* and – prototypically – it refers to a downward movement over a horizontally extended object. Our metaphorical examples to support this description are presented below:

*A trecut cu buretele **peste** incidentul de ieri.* [He passed the sponge **over** yesterday's incident.]

*Colac **peste** pupăză, a mai şi minţit.* [A ring **over** a hoopoe, he even lied. = To crown it all, he even lied.]

*Jack i-a dat **peste** nas/bot.* [Jack has hit him **over/on** the nose. = He has put him in his place.]

In the examples above we can identify both *full cover* and *partial cover* (last example), and this aspect can be also found regarding the English *over* and *above*, or the Hungarian *át* or *felett*.

2.4 PESTE4 time

All the Romanian authors discussing *peste* agree upon the temporal aspect of it, we can only highlight the aspect of *over-above-beyond* the limit regarding the temporal expressions. *Peste2* deals with excess, and this means that the moving object (S) passes a usually upward limit. This is only altered by the perspective, as time is perceived in two basic ways. According to one perception, time is in motion, and usually moves by fast (if it is slow, then it is clearly stated); the other option is when time is a static and horizontally extended

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object and human beings or various events pass over it. The expressions including the Romanian *peste* deal with this latter static time over which various events pass, and seemingly there is no contact between the two:

*S-a făcut matur **peste** noapte.* [He grew up **over**night.]

*Multe s-au întâmplat **peste** vară.*
[Many things happened **during** the summer.]

*Serul îşi va avea efectul **peste** puţin.*
[The effect of the serum will be felt over a short period of time (soon).]

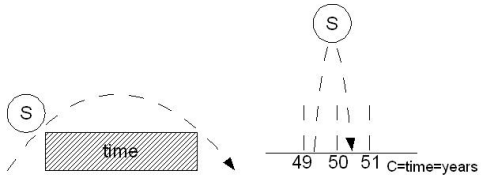


Figure 7. Temporal *peste*

However, as time is perceived metaphorically, it can be perceived as either a horizontally or vertically extended object.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that we have identified at least four different metaphorical cases to be found in DEX 1998. However, we are sure that the analysis can be extended to various other sources as well; an online English-Romanian dictionary shows a high frequency search for both *prin* and *peste*. A further discussion might include the presentation of the metaphorical expressions regarding the Romanian *deasupra* [above] and *asupra* [above/over] and their comparison with *prin*, and check when they are interchangeable (cf. Vasiliu) from the point of view of C, perceived as an obstacle. However, this would go beyond our initial quest, and it can be a starting point of another work. Furthermore, the various similarities and differences between *prin* and *peste* may cast a light upon the difference between translation and meaning, especially when more languages are involved. For instance, if *peste* is viewed in parallel with the English *over, above* and the Hungarian *felett*, the perspective can be illustrated as on the right:

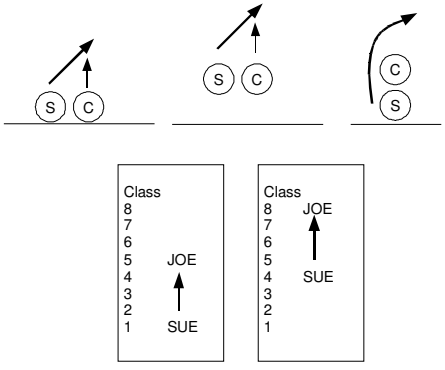


Figure 8. *Peste*, *over*, *above*, *felett*

Finally, we would like to offer a network presentation of *peste*:

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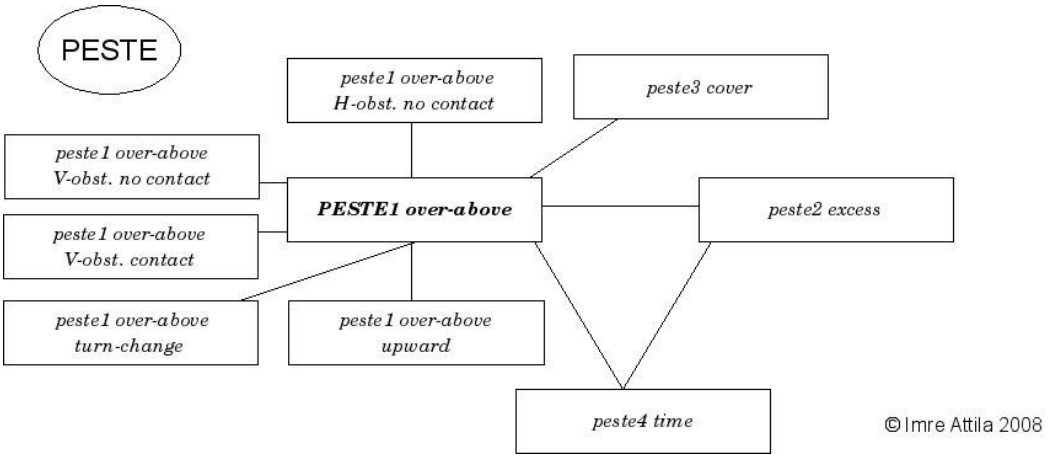


Table 1. *Peste*: central and metaphorical use

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