TEMA

17

Location in Space: Place, Direction and Distance

La localización en el espacio: Lugar, dirección y distancia.

§

NOVIEMBRE DE 2026

Material de elaboración propia a partir de las fuentes oficiales que se citan al final del tema. No es un temario oficial ni sustituye a la normativa publicada.

Índice

1. INTRODUCTION

2. HOW LANGUAGE CONCEPTUALISES SPACE

- 2.1. Figure and Ground
- 2.2. Frames of reference

3. PLACE: EXPRESSING STATIC LOCATION

- 3.1. The prepositions in, on and at
- 3.2. Other prepositions of position
- 3.3. Adverbs, nouns and verbs of place

4. DIRECTION: LOCATION IN MOTION

- 4.1. Goal, source and path
- 4.2. Direction without a preposition: adverbs, particles and bearings
- 4.3. A typological note: motion in English and in Spanish

5. DISTANCE AND DEIXIS

- 5.1. Expressing distance
- 5.2. Spatial deixis

6. ENGLISH AND SPANISH: CONTRASTS AND TYPICAL ERRORS

7. PEDAGOGICAL AND DIDACTIC IMPLICATIONS

8. CONCLUSION

Fuentes

1. INTRODUCTION

"Languages differ in how they describe space": with these words Cambridge University Press presents Stephen Levinson's Space in Language and Cognition (2003), a book which shows that language influences how people think, memorise and reason about spatial relations and directions. The remark is a good starting point for a teacher of English, because the most ordinary question a learner will ever face, "Where is it?", turns out not to be answered in the same way in every language. A speaker of Guugu Yimithirr, an Australian Aboriginal language, would say that a cup is to the north of a plate, while an English speaker would say that it is on the left. Welcome to Topic 17: Location in Space: Place, Direction and Distance.

In order to address this topic, I will divide it into six main sections. Firstly, I will explain how language conceptualises space, introducing the notions of Figure and Ground and the three frames of reference. Secondly, I will analyse the expression of place, that is, static location, through prepositions, adverbs, nouns and verbs. Thirdly, I will turn to direction, which is location in motion: goal, source and path. Fourthly, I will deal with distance and spatial deixis, and fifthly I will compare English and Spanish. Finally, I will reflect on the pedagogical and didactic implications of this content within our current educational framework, before closing with a conclusion.

Before moving on, I would like to mention the sources consulted for the preparation of this topic. These include: Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik's A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language (Longman, 1985); Huddleston and Pullum's The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language (Cambridge University Press, 2002); Swan's Practical English Usage, in its fourth edition (Oxford University Press, 2016); Talmy's Toward a Cognitive Semantics (MIT Press, 2000); and Levinson's Space in Language and Cognition (Cambridge University Press, 2003). I have also drawn on the online resources of the British Council and of the Council of Europe, and on the legal framework: the LOMLOE (Organic Law 3/2020), Real Decreto 217/2022 and Real Decreto 243/2022, and Decreto 110/2022 and Decreto 109/2022 of the Autonomous Community of Extremadura.