

# Preposition selection errors made by Spanish learners of English: exploring the root causes of the errors



Patricia González Díaz, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid ([patricia.gonzalezd@uam.es](mailto:patricia.gonzalezd@uam.es)) WEB: <http://www.alegro.org.es>

## Context

Within the process of acquiring a Second Language, Spanish Learners must frequently deal with specific linguistic aspects that pose problems they find utterly complicated to overcome. Prepositions, due to their heterogeneous nature in each different language, are one of these troublesome aspects.

This poster presents the research on the use of English preposition by Spanish students of English as a Second Language carried on as part of **ALEGRO** project (Adaptive Learning of English Grammar Online). ALEGRO's goal is to develop adaptive learning software which will be able to adapt to the Learner's needs during their training in the L2. It will also facilitate a more autonomous acquisition of the language.

## Goals

- Recognizing the Spanish Learners' misuse of English prepositions
- Determining and classifying which preposition are more difficult for Spanish Learners of English.
- Identifying and classifying the most frequent errors
- Identifying the linguistic reasons behind the errors produced by Spanish Learners.
- Semantic description of the context of each preposition in both L1 and L2.

## Methodology

- The study focuses on prepositions functioning as head of a prepositional phrase.
- Corpus: 80 texts (73,500 words) of Spanish University Learners( all CEFR levels).

Each preposition was automatically located & tagged.

correct wrong

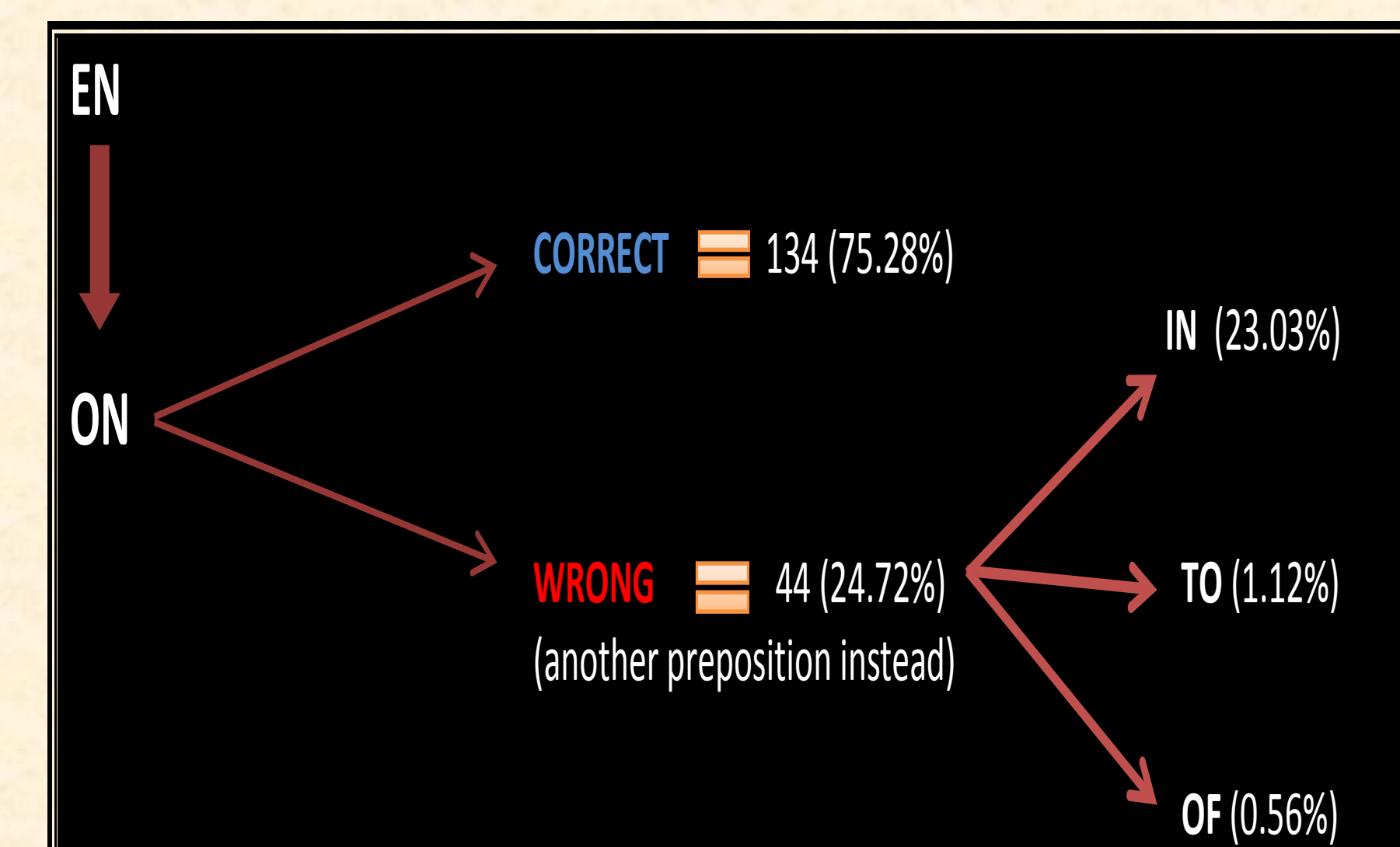
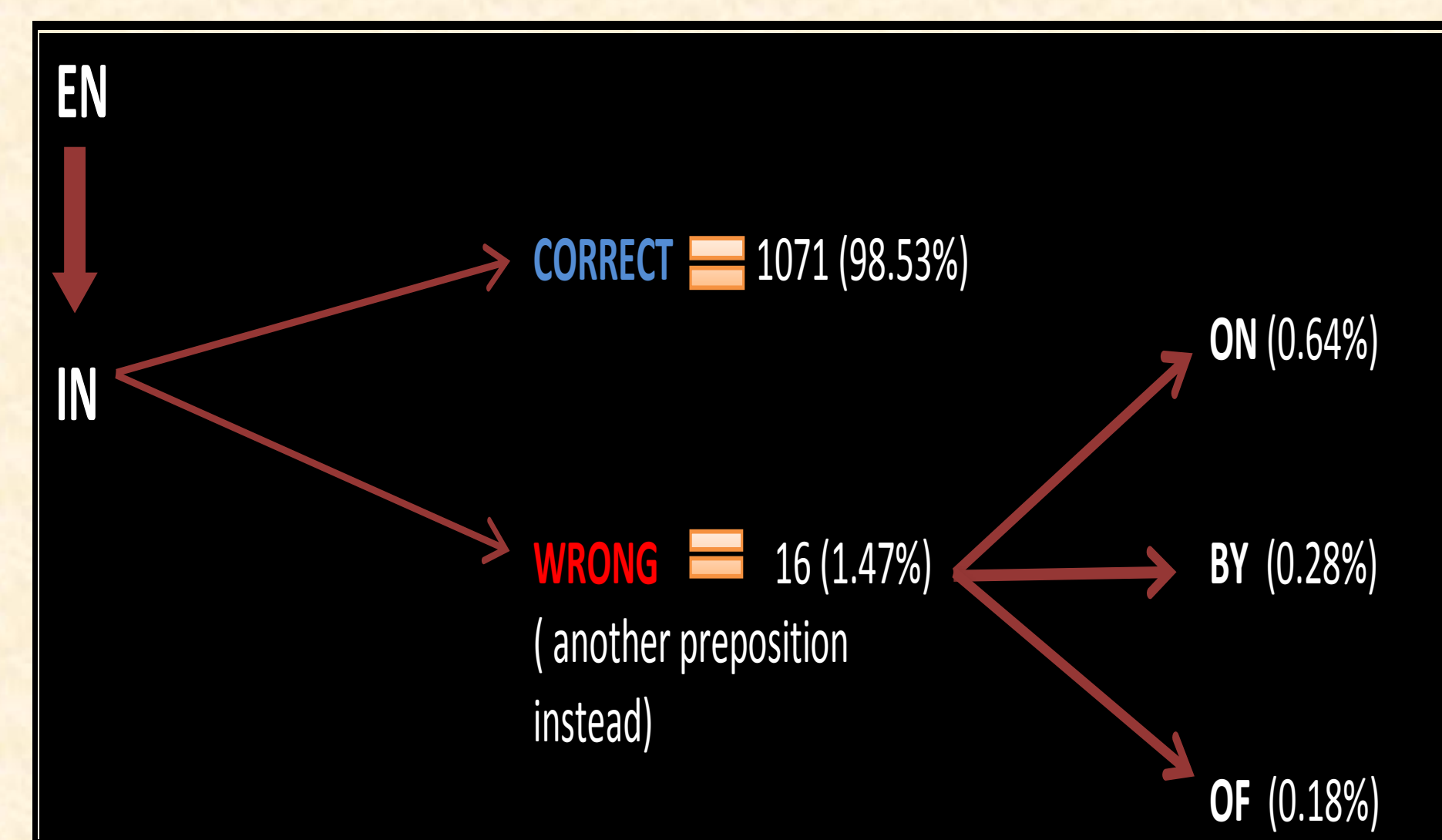
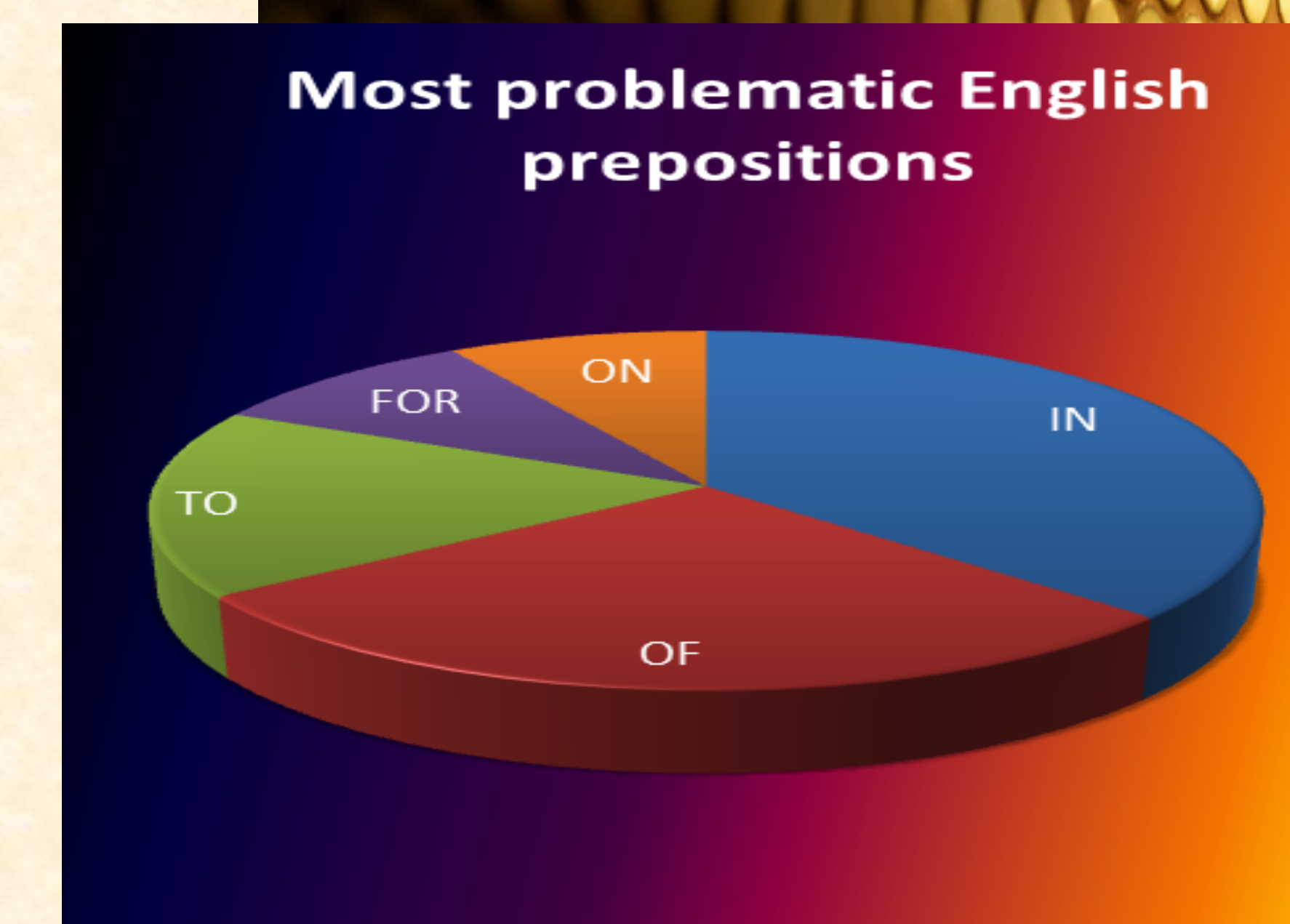
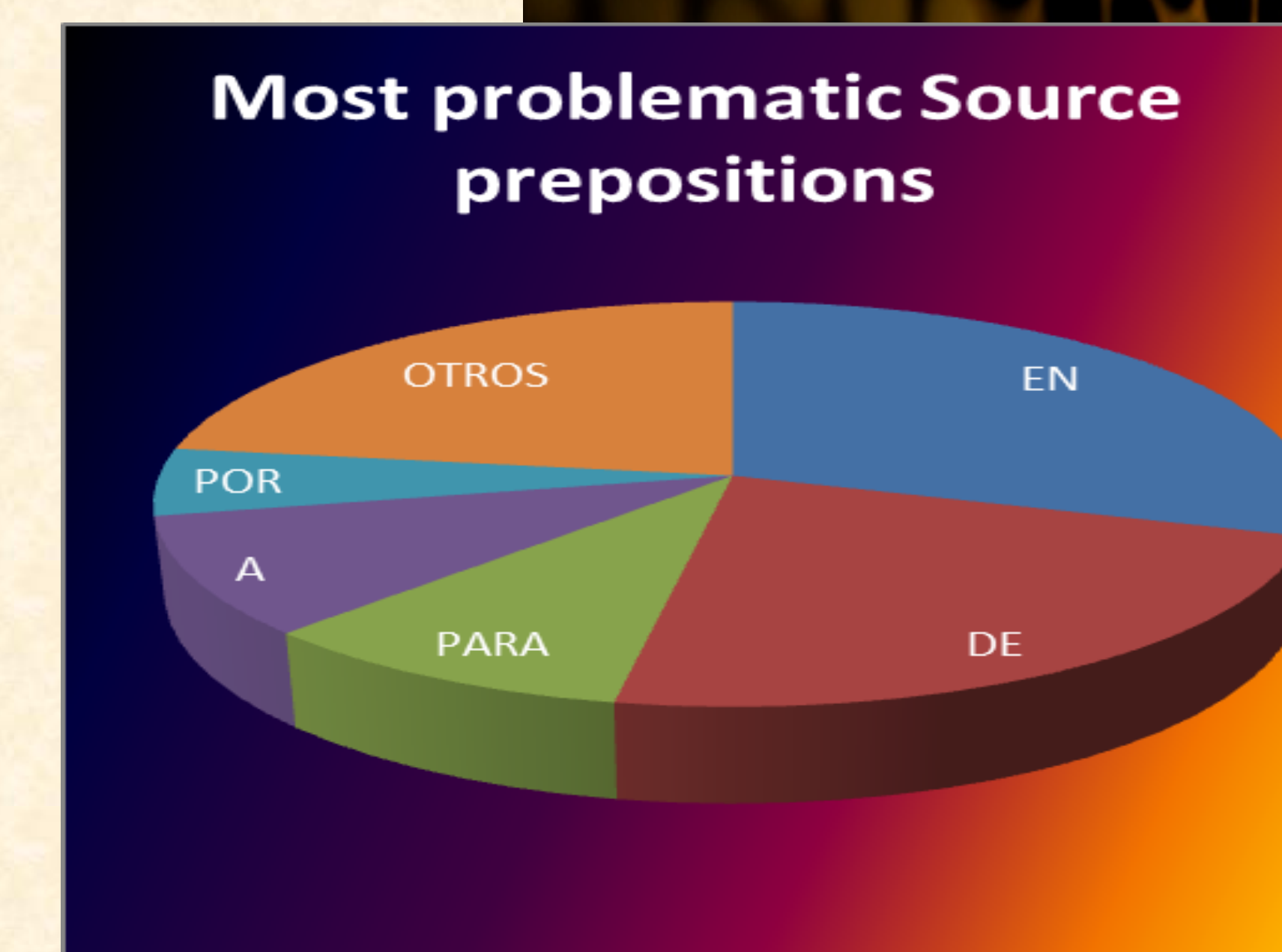
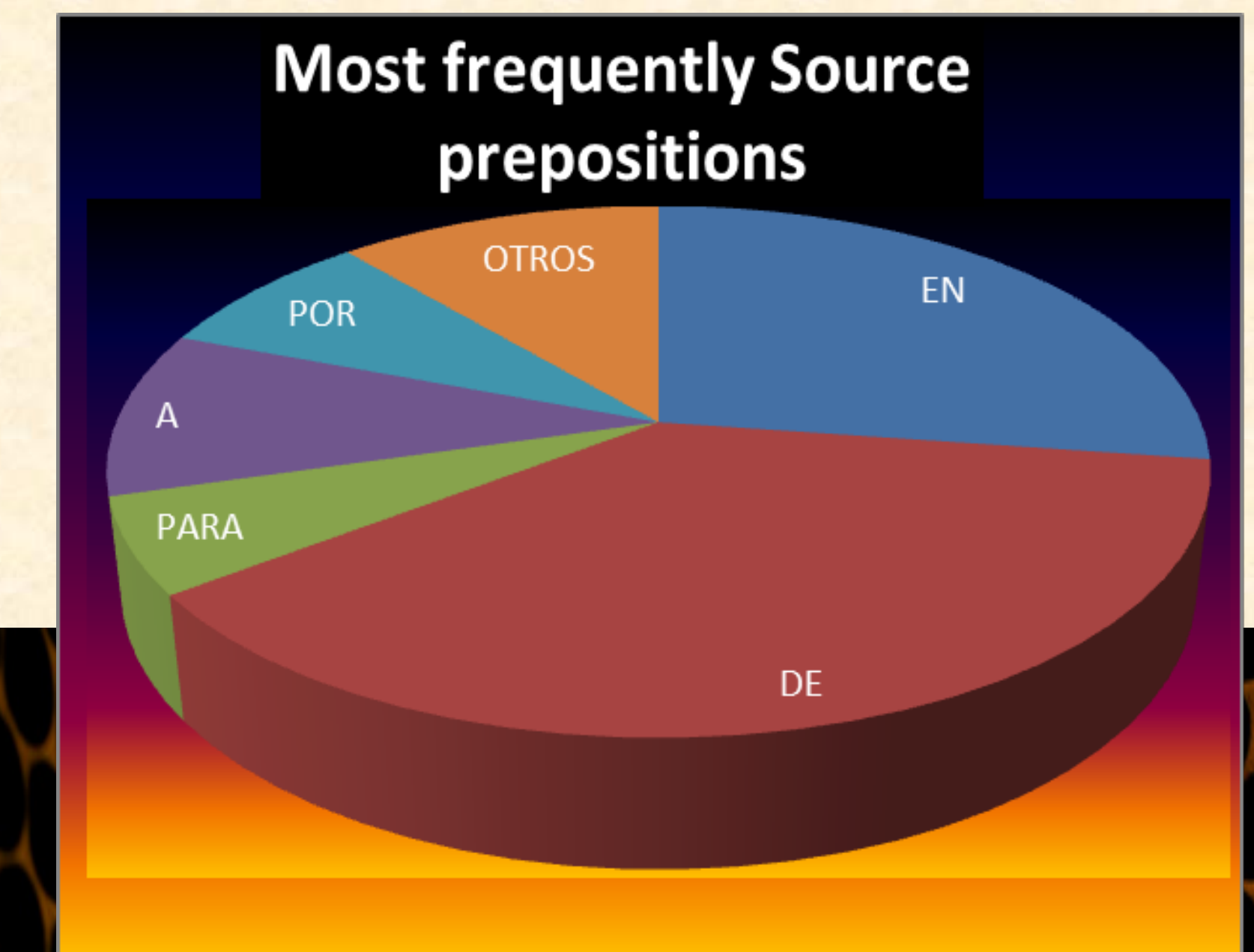
'Back-translation' to derived Spanish source preposition.

## Next steps

- Identify which semantic contexts are more problematic and why (focus on source prepositions):
  - interlanguage problems.
  - pragmatic perception and interpretation.
  - 'out of the norm' contexts.
- Design and production of teaching materials to address these misunderstandings (focus on the target language)
  - provide the right semantic and pragmatic context.
  - offer exercises that deal with these specific contexts and uses.
  - provide suitable feedback.



Semantic meaning translation	Spanish	English	Examples
At a point within an area (1,2,3 dimensions)	EN	IN	Eng: 'in my desk' Spa: 'en mi escritorio'
Somewhere in a general surface area (2 dimensions)	EN	ON	Eng: 'on my desk' Spa: 'en mi escritorio'
Used to show an exact position or particular place	EN	AT	Eng: 'at my desk' Spa: 'en mi escritorio'



## References:

- Murcia Bielsa, S. and MacDonald, P. 2013. "The TREACLE project: Profiling learner proficiency using error and syntactic analysis". In S. Granger, G. Gilquin and F. Meunier (eds.) Twenty Years of Learner Corpus Research: Looking back, Moving ahead. Corpora and Language in Use - Proceedings 1. Louvain-la-Neuve: Presses universitaires de Louvain, 335-344. ISBN 978-2-87558-199-0.
- O'Donnell, M. 2008. "The UAM CorpusTool: Software for corpus annotation and exploration". In Bretones Callejas, Carmen M. et al. (eds) Applied Linguistics Now: Understanding Language and Mind / La Lingüística Aplicada Hoy: Comprendiendo el Lenguaje y la Mente. Almería: Universidad de Almería. Pp. 1433-1447.
- Rollinson, Paul & Mendikoetxea, Amaya 2010. Learner Corpora and Second Language Acquisition: Introducing WriCLE. In Bueno Alonso, Jorge L. et al. (eds) Analizar datos: Describir variación / Analysing Data: Describing Variation. Vigo: Universidad de Vigo, 1-12.
- UCLES (2001). Quick Placement Test (Paper and pencil version). Oxford: Oxford University Press.