

# Lexical and conceptual resources to identify and delimit differences between transborder and border

## Recursos léxicos y conceptuales para identificar y delimitar diferencias entre lo transfronterizo y lo fronterizo

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### Abstract

The article explores the concepts of border and transborder within Fronterology by analyzing their lexical and conceptual evolution. It highlights the importance of distinguishing between border and transborder. Prefixes such as *trans-*, *cis-*, *inter-*, and *circum-* are examined to construct neologisms that describe various spatial relations, considered key to understanding the transborder phenomenon. Additionally, it emphasizes the need for a multiscale and multidimensional approach to comprehend the complexity of the relationships that emerge from the border, suggesting that they are processes in constant redefinition.

Keywords: transborder, cis-border, lexicography, conceptualization, border.

### Resumen

El artículo explora los conceptos de frontera y transfronterizo dentro de la *fronterología*, mediante el análisis de su evolución léxica y conceptual. Se destaca la importancia de distinguir entre frontera y transfronterizo. Se examinan prefijos como *trans-*, *cis-*, *inter-*, y *circun-* para construir neologismos que describen diversas relaciones espaciales, considerado el elemento clave para comprender lo transfronterizo. Asimismo, se enfatiza la necesidad de un enfoque multiescalar y multidimensional para comprender la complejidad de las relaciones que se articulan a partir de la frontera, que sugieren que son procesos en constante redefinición.

Palabras clave: transfronterizo, cisfronterizo, lexicografía, conceptualización, frontera.

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## Introduction

Following Immanuel Kant, Beade (2011, p. 81) proposes that “anyone who wishes to communicate [...] their philosophical ideas must be careful in selecting the terms they use to ensure that their thoughts are adequately expressed”. Similarly, this paper proposes that anyone wishing to communicate their conceptual proposals on borders should be thoughtful in their choice of words to convey their ideas as clearly as possible.

Metaphors, analogies, neologisms, foreign words, idioms, localisms and Latinisms are some of the lexical resources used in the creation of new concepts. Nonetheless, these alternatives can generate terminological ambiguities due to the sometimes thoughtless use of words without consideration of their genealogy, capacity for meaning or explanatory function beyond the strict disciplinary, semantic or geographical context of their utterance.

Before proceeding, it is important to distinguish between three terms: word, term and concept. It can be stated that terms formed from words are used to construct concepts (Marinkovich, 2008). A *word* is an independent sound segment, framed by pauses. It also constitutes a minimal linguistic unit that can occupy an autonomous position in a sentence. It is also expressed graphically and fulfills an essential communicative function by conveying meanings. In short, it is an association between spelling, sound and ideas, which is embedded in broad semiotic systems. Words have an etymology, that is, an origin, often located in a remote time when a previous language, such as Latin, predominated. It also reflects cultural intersections from other times and places. Studies on borders often retrieve Latin words, such as *limes*, or words from other languages, like *marka* (from Germanic). They use analogies such as *epidermis*, or Anglicisms such as *bordering*, as well as neologisms such as *transfrontera* (cross-border).

A *term* encompasses various dimensions: 1) it is a linguistic representation of an idea or concept, that is, it is a cognitive unit that is inserted into a broader system of knowledge; 2) it is a word or phrase that designates an individual, a class or a proposition; 3) it is a standardized and conventional expression within a particular social group, discipline or field of study, and therefore acquires a specific meaning defined by the norms and conventions of that group; and, 4) it is a linguistic or extralinguistic sign that represents an entity, an action, a quality or a relation, which can be expressed through words, numbers or symbols, and its meaning is determined by the code or language to which it belongs. In the case of border studies in Latin America, there has been no significant standardization of terminology in dictionaries or similar resources. One attempt in this direction is the book *Palabras clave para el estudio de las fronteras* (Keywords for the Study of Borders) (Benedetti, 2023).

A *term* is the designation of a concept in a specialized subject area (Marinkovich, 2008). It can be a word from everyday language that takes on a specific meaning, a word created for a particular purpose, a group of words with a unique meaning, a symbol or a formula, among others. Terms differ from general words in their unambiguous association with the specialized concept they designate and in the stability between their lexical form and their meaning. Nevertheless, there are more similarities than differences between terms and general words. Both respond to the need to structure the lexicon to symbolize concepts formally and systematically.

*Concepts* are used to structure knowledge and perception of the world. This is done primarily through verbal language, albeit other codes may sometimes prove more precise and efficient for formalization and communication, such as the periodic table

of elements, maps or equations (Barité Roqueta, 2001). Words and terms form the basis of conceptual construction. *Concepts* are two-fold: they are a logical operation of thought, and they represent the most general and essential features of real-world objects and phenomena (Barrios Fernández & de la Cruz Capote, 2006). Following these authors, it can be stated that concepts are the essential means by which scientific thought operates through generalizations, comparisons, classifications and examples. They construct interpretations of reality and are indispensable cognitive tools for operationalizing and making knowledge understandable. Operationalized concepts enable empirical research and scientific communication. Moreover, concepts constitute methodological devices for marking meanings, for affirming, relating and organizing a series of dimensions of analysis and elements for empirical observation, while simultaneously omitting and leaving many others unemphasized (Cordero, 2019). Another issue is that concepts are meaningful because they belong to a conceptual, disciplinary or multidisciplinary system.

Furthermore, one noteworthy aspect concerns the construction of concepts. Concepts should certainly not be used as preformed structures that are applied without adjustment to any space-time context. In this regard, Ortiz (2004, p. 12) states that the

social sciences thrive on concepts. Crafting them is an art, not necessarily in the artistic sense of the word, but in terms of craftsmanship, a skill... They cannot be mass-produced, according to the old Fordist orthodoxy; it is necessary to take them one by one, in their idiosyncrasy, in their entirety...

According to this premise, the necessary contextual mediations should then be generated so that the concept acquires heuristic power and more clearly reflects what is to be explained. Hence, concepts are fundamental tools in the scientific profession because they have the capacity to provide intelligibility to problematized phenomena (Criado, 2008).

In the field of border research, which was identified with the neologism *fronteología* (borderology) (Nweihed, 1990), *frontera* (border) and *fronterizo(a)* (border-), like *transfrontera* (cross-border) and *transfronterizo(a)* (cross-border-), are two pairs of concepts that raise questions about how they were shaped over time, the idiosyncrasies of each, and their ability to shed light on what they are trying to observe, as well as their lexical and terminological composition. When is it appropriate to use one or the other? What do they identify and what do they define? Are they complementary or do they replace each other? Moreover, are these terms sufficient to account for a wide plurality of objects, subjects and social phenomena? Finally, how are these words constructed lexicographically?

Concepts serve several functions, such as identifying phenomena, subjects and objects, differentiating between them, organizing them and relating them to one another. Each field of knowledge constructs a system or constellation of concepts throughout its institutionalization process, and these concepts constitute an essential part of its know-how. Learning new concepts involves continuously restructuring this matrix, given that they are interrelated according to the links established between them. Concepts are expressed by a representative term or word. They can be defined or developed by means of other associated concepts, and therefore by other terms and words essential to understanding the concept. The complexity of borderology lies in

its interdisciplinary nature, which tends to establish different criteria for proximity, kinship or distance between concepts (Barité Roqueta, 2001).

The Spanish language offers a vast array of words to describe abstractions of reality. Conceptualization prefers to use words shaped by diverse customs and practices, constantly reshaped through social evolution and coined by academic institutions, as well as by public and private organizations, such as media companies. Nevertheless, this lexical repertoire is often insufficient. This is the case with the concepts of limit and border, which became insufficient to describe the plurality of social events. In response to this, some neologisms emerged that, over time, became widely accepted concepts.

One example is *fronterización* (borderization), a word translated from the English term bordering, which is increasingly used in Latin America to describe the procedural, contextual and relational nature of borders (Porcaro, 2017). Along these lines, the concept of *transfronterizo(a)*, which emerged in the last decades of the 20th century and is now fully established in 2025, could also be included. However, what does it mean? How far can it be distinguished from the concept of border? To what extent does it facilitate scientific understanding, or has it become an epistemological obstacle?

This paper has three goals. The first is to review how the term *transfronterizo(a)* is being used, both within and outside the field of borderology. The second is to explore alternative words that could be used in place of cross-border to address specific issues of interest in this field. The third is to propose some clues for a complementary conceptualization of border- and cross-border-. The first goal is developed in the first two sections, while the third and fourth sections are linked to the other two goals.

### The term *transfronterizo(a)*

The media in Spanish has been using the word *transfronterizo(a)* to refer to different events that are in the news, such as land transport between South American countries (“Retos y oportunidades en el transporte terrestre transfronterizo”, 2024) or in reports by government actors on a market between Spain and Portugal (Junta de Extremadura, 2025), or in multinational organizations interested in e-commerce in Latin America (Díaz de Astarloa, 2024). In these cases, *transfronterizo* identifies, defines or categorizes commercial practices between countries across borders.

The words *frontera* and *fronterizo* have been included in the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE, Spanish acronym for Real Academia Española) dictionary since its earliest systematizations. In the *Diccionario de Autoridades*, *frontera* is defined as: “The line and boundary that separates and divides kingdoms, as they are opposite each other. Latin. Fines, limites Regni... In Spain, many have been seen, sent by the Generals of the African borders” (Real Academia Española, 1732). Later, in 1780, it was clarified: “frontera n. f. The line and boundary that separates and divides kingdoms, as they are opposite each other. Fines, limites regni”. Likewise, *fronterizo* is defined as: “fronterizo, adj. That which is placed and positioned in front of something else. Contrarius, contrapositus” (Real Academia Española, 1780). In its most recent version, the dictionary refers to *frontera* as *fronterizo*: “frontera. 1. f. See fronterizo”, where the latter is defined as “1. adj. Placed or positioned in front” (Real Academia Española, 2001). Based on these definitions, it could be concluded that the border is that which is placed in front, on the line (divider); it is the limit (the boundary) or periphery (edge) of a geographical area,

whether it be the territory of a kingdom, a nation-state, or any region. In addition, in 1780, the term *fronterizo* was introduced: “fronterizo. adj. That which is or serves at the border; such as a FRONTERIZO soldier, a FRONTERIZA (border) city, &c. Conterminus, finitimus” (Real Academia Española, 1780), and in 2001 it was clarified: “fronterizo, fronteriza: 1. adj. That which is on the border. Border city. Border soldier” (Real Academia Española, 2001).

On the other hand, the word *transfronterizo* appears for the first time in the most recent edition of the dictionary: “transfronterizo, transfronteriza: 1. adj. Operating across borders. Cross-border trade” (Real Academia Española, 2001). *Transfrontera* (cross-border) has not yet been incorporated. Nonetheless, the prefix *trans-* was documented in 1780 as a preposition: “meaning ‘on the other side’, and widely used in Spanish in composition, either with the same meaning or augmenting that of the word it composes” (Real Academia Española, 1780). This definition was modified in 2001 as: “pref. Means ‘on the other side’, ‘across’. Transalpine, trans-Pyrenean. It can alternate with the form *tras-*. *Translúcido* o *traslúcido* (translucent), *transcendental* o *trascendental* (transcendental). It can also take this form exclusively. *Trasladar*, *traspaso* (transfer)” (Real Academia Española, 2001). An example of its use is the term *transalpino* (transalpine), which in 1780 was defined as: “adj. That which is, or belongs to, a country on the other side of the Alps. Transalpinus” (Real Academia Española, 1780), and in 2001 it was clarified: “transalpine: 1. adj. The regions that are located on the other side of the Alps from Italy” (Real Academia Española, 2001). This shows that *trans-* has been present since the 18th century, but its association with the concept of border did not become established until the last millennium.

Apart from the RAE dictionaries, it is useful to analyze the use of this word in specialized literature. To do so, the Books Ngram Viewer tool developed by Google was used, which allows users to track the frequency of use of specific words or phrases in an extensive corpus comprising millions of books published from the 16th century to 2025. This platform examines terms within its extensive collection of digitized books and illustrates how their usage has evolved over time. The results are presented as graphs, which facilitate the visualization of trends and provide insight into the evolution of language.

A search was conducted for the terms *frontera* and *transfrontera*, as well as *fronterizo* and *transfronterizo*, for the period between 1800 and 2022. As shown in Figure 1, the term *frontera* has been used consistently throughout the entire period analyzed, indicating sustained growth between the 1960s and 2000s, after which it began to decline. In contrast, *transfrontera* is a term that is practically unused in the bibliographic corpus considered.

In the case of *fronterizo* and *transfronterizo* (see Figure 2), the former shows increasing use throughout the period, while the latter was almost non-existent until the 1960s. From 1980 onwards, its use began to rise steadily, although it remains much less frequent than *fronterizo*.

In addition, two other relevant words were consulted: *internacional* (international) and *transnacional* (transnational) (see Figure 3). The term *internacional* experienced sustained growth from the 1840s, peaked around 1980, and then began to decline. Meanwhile, the use of *transnacional* increased from the 1980s onwards, although it always remained well below *internacional*.

When comparing the six words (see Figure 4), it is clear that *internacional* continues to be the most frequently used term, although its use is steadily declining. Conversely, *frontera* remains relatively stable in terms of frequency, while *transfronterizo* shows a slight increase, although it remains significantly lower than the other two words.

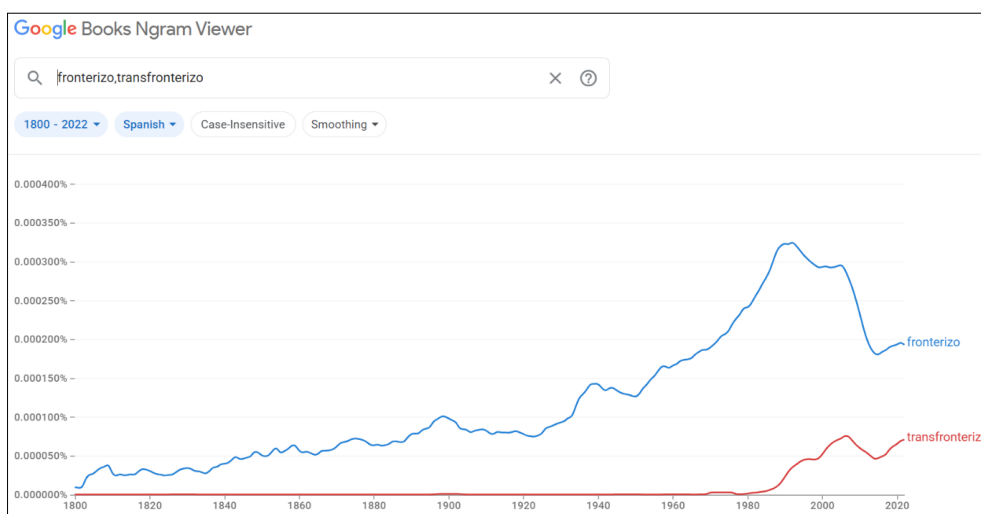
Despite its low overall frequency in Google Books, there has been a growing use of *transfronterizo* in the field of border studies. This includes its designation or inclusion as a reference in some widely disseminated academic products (see Table 1).

**Figure 1. Frequency of use of the terms *frontera* and *transfrontera* in the GoogleBooks database in Spanish (1800–2022)**



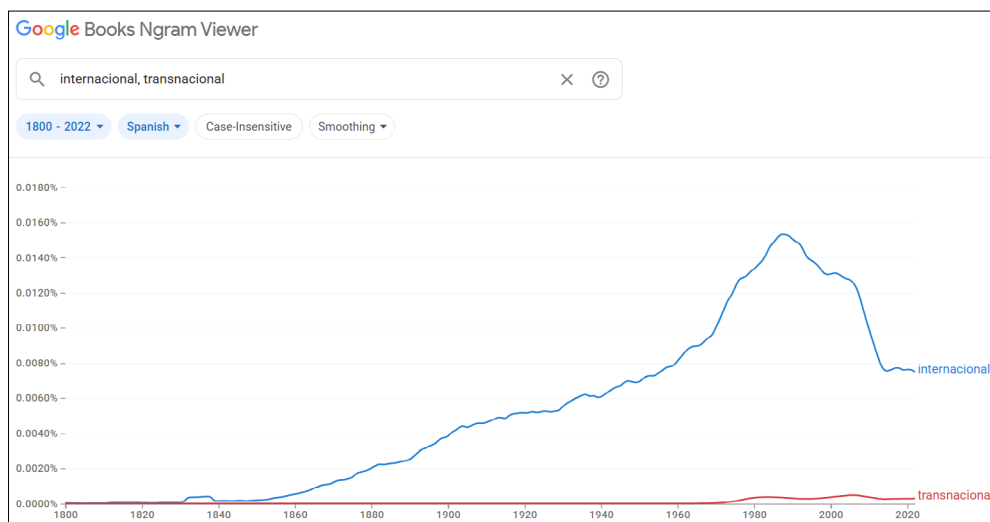
Source: screenshot of the query performed at <https://books.google.com/ngrams>

**Figure 2. Frequency of use of the terms *fronterizo* and *transfronterizo* in the Google Books database in Spanish (1800–2022)**



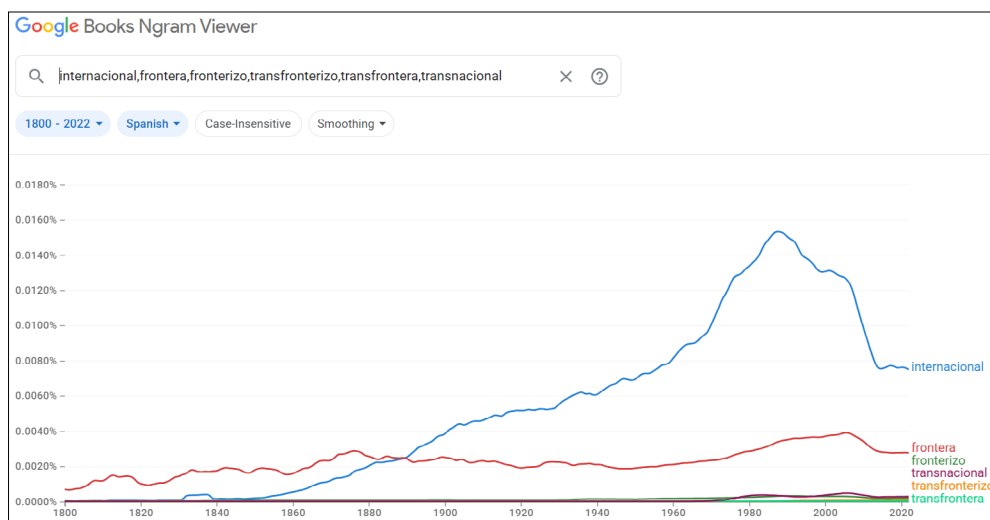
Source: screenshot of the query performed in Books Ngram Viewer <https://books.google.com/ngrams>

**Figure 3. Frequency of use of the terms *internacional* and *transnacional* in the Google Books database in Spanish (1800–2022)**



Source: screenshot of the query performed at <https://books.google.com/ngrams>

**Figure 4. Frequency of use of the terms *internacional*, *frontera*, *fronterizo*, *transfronterizo*, *transfrontera*, and *transnacional* in the Google Books database in Spanish (1800–2022)**



Source: screenshot of the query performed at <https://books.google.com/ngrams>



**Table 1. Academic publications that use the term *transfronterizo(a)* as part of the title or as a reference**

Name and link	Year of creation	Type of product
<i>Boletín (Trans)Fronteriza</i> <a href="https://www.clacso.org/boletín-1-transfronteriza-la-etnografia-en-los-estudios-de-frontera/">https://www.clacso.org/boletín-1-transfronteriza-la-etnografia-en-los-estudios-de-frontera/</a>	2020	Bulletin published by the Clacso Working Group on Migration and South-South Borders. Issue 24 was published in September-October 2024.
<i>Si Somos Americanos. Revista de Estudios Transfronterizos</i> <a href="https://sisomosamericanos.cl/index.php/sisomosamericanos/index">https://sisomosamericanos.cl/index.php/sisomosamericanos/index</a>	2000	Published by the Institute of International Studies at Arturo Prat University, it is an internationally indexed scientific journal that analyzes cross-border phenomena, with a focus on the American continent.
VI Encuentro Latinoamericano de Estudios Transfronterizos, 2021 <a href="https://www.ismercosur.org/es/vi-encuentro-latinoamericano-de-estudios-fronterizos-cuenta-con-el-apoyo-del-ism/">https://www.ismercosur.org/es/vi-encuentro-latinoamericano-de-estudios-fronterizos-cuenta-con-el-apoyo-del-ism/</a>	2009	This encounter brought together presentations focused on border and cross-border regions in Latin America and the Mercosur region.
<i>Estudios Fronterizos</i> <a href="https://ref.uabc.mx/ojs/index.php/ref">https://ref.uabc.mx/ojs/index.php/ref</a>	1983	Although the name of the journal does not include the word <i>transfronterizos</i> (cross-border), it does mention this reference in its mission statement, which is “to establish itself as a space for debate and dissemination of knowledge generated about borders in general, international borders, border regions and border and cross-border phenomena around the world”.

Source: created by the author

## Conceptual proposals on *transfronterizo*

It is undoubtedly in the specialized field of *borderology* that the use of the terms *transfronterizo(a)* and, to a lesser extent, *transfrontera*, becomes relevant. The following definitions serve as examples:

*Transfronterizo*: “... is the result of the historical sedimentation of practices [...] Looked at from the border, it is proposed that the contiguity of the socioeconomic structures of the United States and Mexico generates cross-border activities consisting of everyday and occasional practices” (Ruiz, 1992, p. 105).  
Cross-border relationships:

[...] everyday interpersonal relationships established by those who live near the border [...] Cross-border relations are shaped by the daily interaction of residents on both sides of the border through everyday practices such as the



mass crossing of people or the shared use of space [...] the cross-border concept is based on the “process of living and surviving in the region”, creating strategies to make the border a resource. (Odgers Ortiz, 2006, p. 121)

Cross-border area: “territorial strip surrounding the demarcation line, to focus on cross-border social relations involving both sides of the national border and their respective inhabitants” (Linares, 2009, p. 51).

Cross-border scenarios:

The cities and settlements that make up these subsystems perform functions that transcend national borders, facilitate bilateral flows and dynamics and enable the construction of cross-border scenarios, supported by significant components such as integrated infrastructure [...] that promote interactions, mobility and daily exchanges. (Valero Martínez, 2009, pp. 7-15)

Cross-border cooperation: “the strategic alliance of neighboring actors and territories to strengthen regional integration processes” (Rhi-Sausi & Oddone, 2012, p. 240).

*Transfronteras*: “incorporate the other side, the beyond, change or relocation, as inseparable aspects” (Valenzuela Arce, 2014, p. 9).

Cross-border regions: “... multidimensional and multiscale space/time systems that encompass contiguous territories under different national jurisdictions” (Dilla Alfonso & Breton Winkler, 2018, p. 20).

Cross-border areas: “... relations or relationships ranging from family ties, the exchange of goods and political and integration associations, to shared ideas and world-views on issues such as territory, which differ from the ideas and practices of the state” (Álvarez Fuentes, 2020, p. 84).

Cross-border agreements: “any regular negotiation process that occurs between cross-border actors and whose agency value lies in the adoption of agreements to manage regular exchange processes that shape these territories and the nature of the borderization processes that take place” (Dilla Alfonso & Contreras Vera, 2021, p. 4).

As noted, the cross-border dimension helps to identify and describe a wide range of phenomena involving actors and their spaces differentiated by a border in diverse historical contexts. To this end, the concepts of *cross-border regions* (Coletti, 2010; Dilla Alfonso, 2020; Dilla Alfonso & Breton Winkler, 2018), *cross-border agreements* (Dilla Alfonso & Contreras Vera, 2021), *cross-border areas* (Álvarez Fuentes, 2020; Linares, 2009), *cross-border issues* (Odgers Ortiz, 2006; Ruiz, 1992), *cross-border scenarios* (Valero Martínez, 2009), *cross-border processes* (Alegría, 1989), *cross-border cooperation* (Rhi-Sausi & Oddone, 2012), and *cross-border transactions* (Jessop, 2004) were used. Valenzuela Arce (2014) introduces *transfronteras* and Tapia Ladino (2017) introduces *transfronteridad*.

A review of these proposals provides several conclusions. The most relevant is that there is no agreed or generic definition of *cross-border*. Each author attempts their own approach, in some cases revisiting previous ones. Generally, definitions are tailored to the specific context of observation. In the references analyzed, it is common to find proposals inspired by critical geography (for example, multiscale territory or everyday life space) or spatial analysis (flows, spatial dynamics, network or systemic analysis), although these scientific tendencies are not always explicitly recognized.

In addition, it is common to specify the spatio-temporal scales considered, such as subsystems, everyday interaction, differences with respect to the national level or local and regional approaches.

Another key aspect of these definitions is the interactive nature of borders. Cross-border issues are viewed as the integration of networks of relationships or systems spanning two countries, highlighting their relational nature. This implies connections and links between actors, communities, areas or places on both sides of the border. Such interactions often take the form of institutional or actor networks that promote mobility and exchange between both sides. On the one hand, everyday interactions occur in short cycles and include family and neighborhood relationships and interpersonal encounters. On the other hand, the procedural nature of cross-border activities highlights their dynamic and constantly evolving nature, which is a result of ongoing interactions and negotiations.

An additional point to consider is the lack of an explicit distinction between *frontera* and *transfrontera*. In cross-border relations, it is not entirely clear what the function of the border is, nor where one ends and the other begins. The measurement and observation tools that allow the scope of cross-border relations to be established are rarely mentioned. Although Valenzuela Arce (2014) points out their importance, the author does not propose clear solutions to this limitation.

In many cases, the border is not described in detail and is often reduced to the international boundary, while *cross-border* refers to the relations between entities located on both sides of the boundary. In general, cross-border issues are conceived as a space for encounter, exchange and identity construction that goes “beyond the border”. Nevertheless, curiously, in the analysis of cross-border issues, power relations, differences in interests, conflicts and their descents into violence are often less explicit.

Cross-border issues are often presented as the result of meetings and agreements, reflecting coexistence and consensus. This overlooks the conflict inherent in all social relationships, especially in border contexts. Furthermore, geographical proximity is presented as a factor that facilitates cross-border interactions. Nonetheless, it is worth questioning whether geographical proximity alone guarantees interaction, as Tapia Ladino (2017) suggests. In fact, many border cities plan their land use without integrating the other side of the border (Silva Sandes, 2020), suggesting that physical proximity does not always translate into effective coordination.

In all cases, the prefix *trans-* or *tras-* and the suffixes *-izo/a/s* or *-dad* are added to the root word *frontera*. This gives rise to the term *transfronterizo/a/s*, which functions as an adjective to describe other concepts, such as regions, agreements or transactions. The variant *transfrontericidad* refers to the cross-border essence inherent in events, phenomena, objects or subjects. Thus, *transfronterizo(a)* is used as an adjective, while *transfrontera* and *transfrontericidad* act as nouns: the former concrete and the latter abstract. In all these variants, the spatial dimension of the phenomena studied is always present. Nevertheless, as Tapia Ladino states, “it is necessary to measure in some way the magnitude of exchanges and how interaction is constituted” or, in other words, “it is necessary not to take the *transfrontericidad* nature for granted in a border region” (Tapia Ladino, 2017, p. 75).

This raises questions about the spatial and conceptual scope of the term *transfronterizo*, whether it is sufficient to describe the plurality of relationships that occur on both sides of borders and, finally, how it differs from the term *fronterizo*. To this end, it is

interesting to explore the production of neologisms to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of this term, or rather, its capacity for meaning. This can be done by drawing on the variety of lexical resources offered by the Spanish language, only some of which have been collected by the Royal Spanish Academy.

## Prefixes and compositional elements

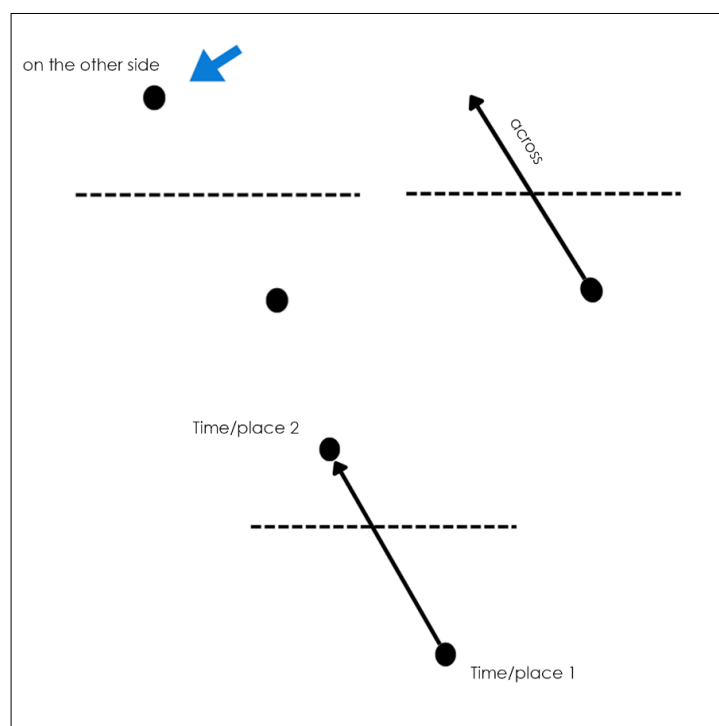
In the field of border studies, the search for more sophisticated conceptual tools or those that shed light on aspects that are rarely problematized often leads to the creation of neologisms. In many cases, these arise from the incorporation of Anglicisms or their translation, as in the case of the term *fronterización*, derived from bordering, or from the insistence on differentiating between *frontera* as border and as frontier. Likewise, the transformation of the word *frontera* through the addition of prefixes, suffixes and compositional elements gives rise to neologisms that attain the status of concepts, such as *transfronterizo*.

Prefixes, suffixes and infixes function as pieces of a linguistic puzzle, since they have no complete meaning on their own; this meaning is only achieved when they are properly combined with a root, thus generating a new lexical unit. For their part, compositional elements enable the construction of compound words (Martín García, 2020).

In the case of *transfronterizo*, *frontera* is the independent element, that is, the root or lexeme of the word, which constitutes a minimal unit with lexical meaning. In contrast, the prefix *trans-* and the suffix *-izo* are dependent elements. In addition, it is possible to add a complementary element, such as *multi-*, which denotes plurality or multiplicity, allowing the word *multitransfrontericidad* to be constructed.

Prefixes in Spanish are usually classified into different types according to their function: negation (*a-/an-*, *anti-*, *contra-*, etcetera), temporal (*ante-*, *pos-/post-*, and *pre-*), intensification (*archi-*, *extra-*, *hiper-*, *re-*, among others), quantity and size (*bi-/bis-*, *mini-*, or *mono-/mon-*), and nominalization, which are linked to specific concepts such as *zoo-* animal: *zoofilia*, *zoológico* (*fito-*, *biblio-*, *geo-*, etcetera). Finally, there are locative prefixes, which indicate spatial, temporal or gradational relations. These are particularly relevant here, as they allow the concept of border—which is eminently spatial—to be expanded or modified by adding a morpheme that indicates a specific relatedness. These are *ante-*, *cis-*, *entre-/inter-*, *infra-*, *pos-/post-*, *sub-/so-*, *trans-/tras-*, *ultra-*, and *vice-*.

Is it possible to combine *frontera* with these prefixes? The most recognizable case is *transfronterizo* (see Figure 5). The prefix *tras-/trans-* means “on the other side of” or “across” (<https://dle.rae.es/trans->). It is used with nouns derived from place names, for example, Atlántico, to indicate that something is heading toward the other side or is already there: *trasatlántico* (transatlantic). When combined with verbs, it describes the crossing of a boundary, as in *traspasar* (trespass). In contexts of great distance, this prefix could take on a meaning similar to that of *ultra-*, from Latin, meaning “beyond” or “on the other side of” (<https://dle.rae.es/ultra->), as in *ultramar* (overseas), which would give rise to *ultrafronterizo* (ultra-cross-border).

**Figure 5. Schematic representation of cross-border relations**

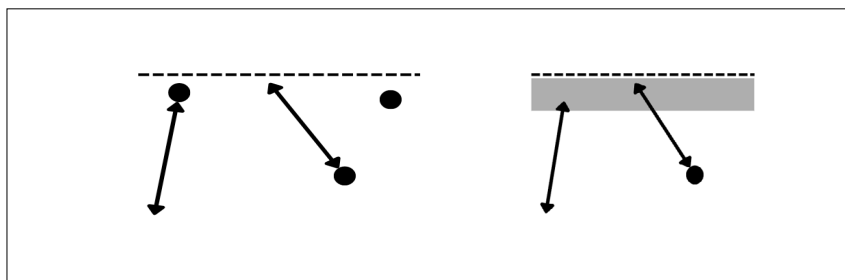
Source: created by the author

The word *transfronterizo* implies a trajectory that bypasses and crosses a border, that is, it is the crossing to the other side, or it indicates that it is already there. Transformed into a verb, *transfronterizar* could express the action of moving something across the border (similar to overflowing), focusing on the final destination of something or someone. It is often used to refer to the interconnections between one side and the other, such as crossing the border to go shopping. In this logic, *pos-/post-* could be added, meaning “behind” or “after” (<https://dle.rae.es/pos->), as in *posbélico* (post-war). Thus, *posfronterizo* would be everything that lies behind the border or the moment after crossing it. In an offensive border movement, *posfronterizos* are places where the occupation begins, such as checkpoints in the advance guard, but still unstable because hostilities have not ceased.

Nevertheless, not all connections involving borders necessarily refer to what happens on or across the other side, to the inevitable crossing. It is essential to recall the concept of *frontero*, an adjective meaning ‘placed or positioned in front’, with the border being part of a larger entity. Therefore, it is necessary to put *cis* before *trans*. The prefix *cis-* means “from this side or this part” (<https://dle.rae.es/cis->), as in *cisandino* (on this side of the Andes). From this prefix, the word *cisfronterizas* can be constructed to identify the interactions that occur on this side of the border (see Figure 6). It can be linked to the prefix *pre-*, which indicates local or temporal anteriority (<https://dle.rae.es/pre->), as in *prehistoria* (prehistory). *Prefronteriza*, for example, would be the last city on a journey before reaching the border, while, conversely, *posfronteriza* would be the first city reached after crossing it.

The *cisfrontera* (cisborder) refers to the boundary that can be reached from the interior, functioning as the maximum range or limit that was not crossed. In a nation-state, it would describe the areas or strips adjacent to the border where specific policies, such as sanitary barriers, are implemented. Bilateral relations are both *transfronterizas* and *cisfronterizas*, as the border is observed, acted upon, and crossed (or not) from two centers of power, one on each side.

Figure 6. Schematic representation of *cisfronterizas* relations

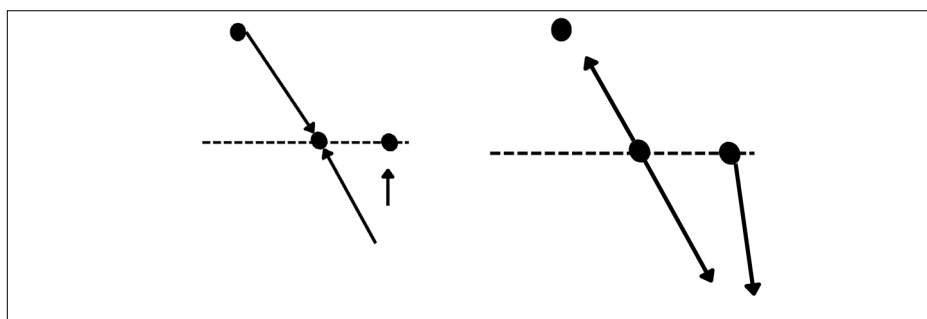


Source: created by the author

Movements to, from, or across the border are usually linked in some way. If the aim is to analyze this interconnection, the following prefixes could be useful: *de-* (<https://dle.rae.es/de->), indicating origin or provenance—so that *defronterizo* would describe what comes from the border once the boundary is crossed—and *ad-* (<https://dle.rae.es/ad->), which denotes direction, tendency or proximity—where *adfronterizo* would refer to movements toward the border.

For example, some goods leave a seaport and travel inland to a Mediterranean border town, from where they are distributed to neighboring territories. The route to that city from that and other points can be described as *centrípeta* (centripetal): movement toward the border, which acts as a concentrator, that is, *adfronteriza*; and from there as *centrífuga* (centrifugal): movement from the border, which acts as a distributor, that is, *defronteriza*. In this way, these border cities serve as commercial hubs, concentrating and distributing goods to and from multiple destinations (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Schematic representation of *adfronterizas* and *defronterizas* relations

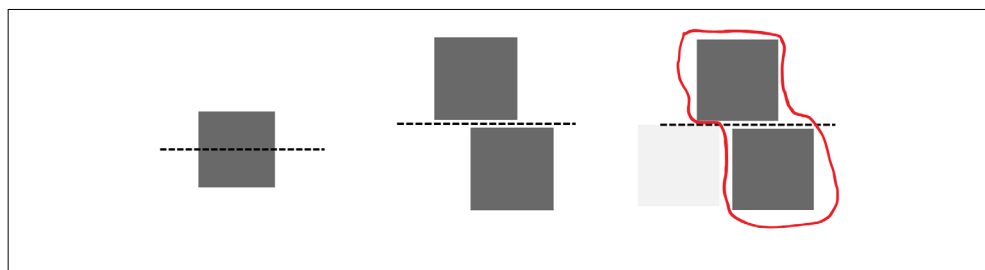


Source: created by the author

The prefix *con-* (or its variants *com-* and *co-*) denotes union or aggregation (<https://dle.rae.es/con->), as in *confluir* (to converge). Thus, the word *cofrontera* refers to the union of previously separate entities, allowing spatial continuity where there was previously discontinuity. For example, two territories in conflict can, through agreements, form a confederal entity, where the border loses its original function of disjunction. This prefix is also present in the term *colindancia* (adjacency), which implies the proximity between territories, although this does not always guarantee communication or circulation. Here, the prefix *dis-* (<https://dle.rae.es/dis->), which denotes separation or distinction, basic functions of the border, could be employed, so that certain practices may be *disfronterizas* (leading to disunity) and others *cofronterizas* (promoting union).

Cooperation activates contiguity by promoting joint actions, such as the creation of associations, binational corporations or integration committees. Thus, joint security work between forces deployed on both sides of the border could be considered *cofronterizo*, where collaboration transforms proximity into potential for coordination and convergence (see Figure 8). Nonetheless, more than convergence, separation is at the heart of the border. To this end, it can be argued that the border generates dislocations or separations, from which cross-border relations arise, which can blur it to the point of making it disappear.

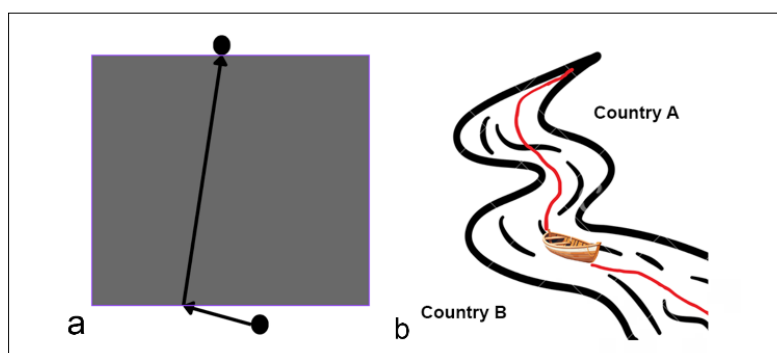
**Figure 8. Schematic representation of continuity, contiguity and confluence relations**



Source: created by the author

The prefix *entre-* means intermediate situation, position, characteristic or degree, as in *entreabrir* (to open slightly); it also expresses reciprocal action, as in *entrecruzar* (to intertwine) (<https://dle.rae.es/entre->). Likewise, *inter-* means “between” or “in the middle”, as in *intercostal*, or “among several”, as in *interministerial* (interdepartmental) (<https://dle.rae.es/inter->). Applied to the border area, the words *interfronterizo* and *entrefronteras* emerge, which can refer to an area between two borders (see Figure 9a). This happens in migrations to the global North, where migrants first cross the border of a pre-border country, *ante-fronterizo*—for example, from Guatemala to Mexico for Central American migrants—and then a second border, that of Mexico and the United States. In this trajectory, the entire Mexican territory becomes *entrefronterizo* (inter-cross-border).

Figure 9. Schematic representation of a) *entrefronterizas* (left) and b) *intrafronterizas* (right) relations



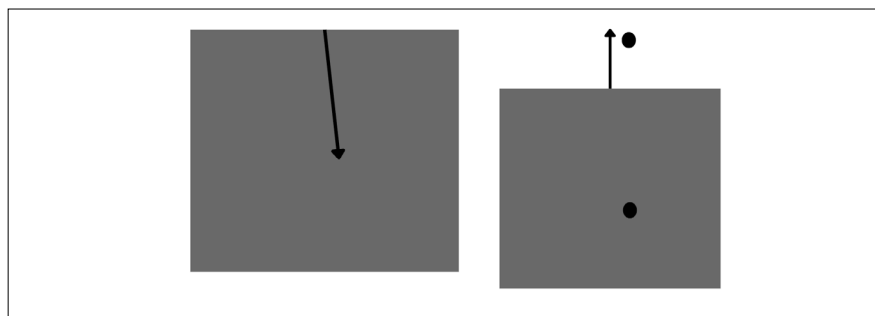
Source: created by the author

By virtue of the prefix *intra-*, which means “within” or “inside” (<https://dle.rae.es/intra->), as in *intramuros* (within the walls), the word *intrafronterizo* arises, which refers to what happens within the border. If it is accepted that the border is not reduced to a line, but is understood as an area, relationships are formed within it. The word *intrafrontera* could refer to the internal divisions of the border, as a space with interstices. In border complexes, for example, public buildings are located alongside others with restricted access, micro-borders within the border. Some borders are even configured as traffic routes (see Figure 9b), especially in the case of binational rivers or in areas called “dry borders”, where the boundary coincides with a street.

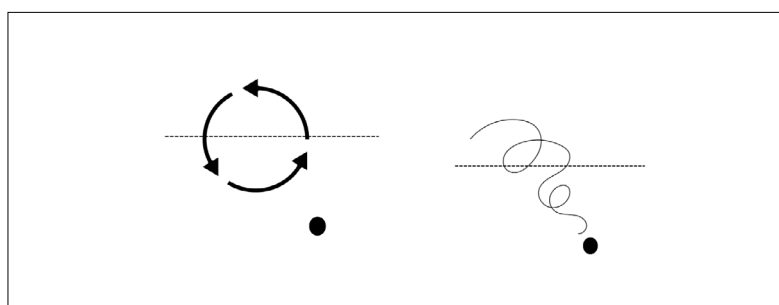
Two other prefixes to consider are *in-* (along with its variants *im-* and *en-*), which means “inside” or “within” (<https://dle.rae.es/in->), and *ex-* (along with its variant *e-*), which indicates origin, exteriority or something that is “outside” or “beyond” in relation to space or time (<https://dle.rae.es/ex->). On the other hand, *extra-* means “outside” (<https://dle.rae.es/extra->). *In-* is associated with terms such as *inmigración* (immigration), *importación* (importation), or *endógeno* (endogenous), which imply movements or conditions related to the interior of a territory. In contrast, *ex-* is linked to terms such as *emigración* (emigration), *exportación* (export) or *exógeno* (exogenous), that is, everything related to the outside of the territory. The focus here is not on the border itself, but on the inside or outside of the territory and its possible inter-relations (see Figure 10).

To conclude this section, it is necessary to mention the compositional element *circun-* (and its variant *circum-*), which means “around”, as in *circumpolar* (<https://dle.rae.es/circun->). This prefix is related to the term *circuir*, which means to surround or encircle something or someone. In the border context, *circunfronterizas* movements can include various types of mobility that describe coming and going from or to the border, and which can surround it (see Figure 11). For example, *trashumancia* (transhumance) is a type of mobility that circles the border. These actions reflect a constant flow around the border, despite attempts by those who establish it to prevent it.



**Figure 10. Schematic representation of internal and external relations**

Source: created by the author

**Figure 11. Schematic representation of *circunfronterizas* relations**

Source: created by the author

## Border relations or *transfronteridades*

The RAE coined the term *transfronterizo(a)*, giving it the meaning “1. adj. Operating across borders. Cross-border trade” (<https://dle.rae.es/transfronterizo>). *Cisfronterizo*, *confronterizo*, *intrafronterizo* and the other words discussed in the previous section are not present in the dictionary, nor are they used in studies on borders. But the meaning given to *transfronterizo* far exceeds the mere reference to something that operates across borders.

As presented at the beginning, the range of meanings of the words *transfrontera* and *transfronterizo* aims to describe and interpret, centrally, spatial connections generated by the presence of the border. The different locative prefixes and the proposed words describe the relations that arise, are activated and are singularized by the formation of the border, by its presence and the alterations it causes in certain trajectories and by the political, economic and cultural centrality it comes to acquire.

Spatial connections are usually expressed through the language of geometry and spatial analysis, which are encoded between points, lines and polygons or networks and systems that model the actions and inactions that link (in practical or analytical terms) places, routes and regions. This gives rise to concepts that describe different spatial connections, such

as adjacency and separation, aggregation or union and disaggregation or disunion, association and dissociation, coincidence and dissent, complementarity and incompatibility or antagonism, connectivity and dysconnectivity, exposure and concealment, inclusion and exclusion, orientation or direction, proximity and distance, symmetry and asymmetry, balance and imbalance, cooperation and conflict and distancing and rapprochement, etcetera.

Based on this vocabulary, *transfronterizo* is defined as “contiguous territories under different national jurisdictions” (Dilla Alfonso & Breton Winkler, 2018), “geographical contiguity of regions with structural differences” (Ruiz Juárez & Martínez Velasco, 2015, p. 152), “functions that transcend national boundaries, facilitating bilateral flows and dynamics” (Valero Martínez, 2009, pp. 7-15), or “the relation between a border city in one country and a contiguous foreign counterpart” (Alegría, 1989). It is also described as “the contiguity of socioeconomic structures” (Ruiz, 1992), “strategic alliance between contiguous actors and territories” (Rhi-Sausi & Oddone, 2012, p. 240) or “territorial area that includes two or more border zones that face a border boundary” (Coletti, 2010, p. 164).

Based on this repertoire, it could be suggested that the *transfrontera* does not circumscribe a single type of spatial connection but rather seeks to highlight the diverse connections that emerge because of, with and despite the border. The *transfrontera* is a theoretical-methodological device for cutting out multidimensional and multiscalar relations, since spatial phenomena are constructed, expressed, and can be studied from different scales and dimensions of social evolution. This introduces another compositional element: *multi-*, which means “many” (<https://dle.rae.es/multi->), as in *multinacional* (multinational). From this derives the word *multitransfronterizo*, given that all the relations used as examples in the previous section occur simultaneously, in superposition and contradiction, achieving stability or translating into conflict. Observing one or the other is ultimately an analytical exercise that involves isolating significant units, that is, defining certain scales while omitting others, a characteristic of the scientific approach to social spatiality (Benedetti, 2020).

It would also seem that it is not possible to understand *transfronterizo* and rebuild *transfrontera* without first, or at the same time, seeking to understand *fronterizo* and *frontera*.

From *frontera* arises *transfrontericidad* or *transfronterizo*, that is, the *transfronterizamiento* of human experience (Tapia Ladino, 2017), of social practices, of everyday life between two territories, of the evolution of cultures, of political intrigues and of economic formations. If there is *transfronterizamiento*, then there is also *fronterizamiento*. The suffix *-miento*—which takes the forms *-amiento* and *-imiento*, as in *debilitamiento* (weakening) or *atrevimiento* (boldness)—in deverbal nouns, such as *frontera*, gives an idea of action and effect (<https://dle.rae.es/-miento>). In this lexical construction, *fronterizamiento* (borderization) is an action that results in the breakdown of identity or the fracturing of spatial sameness; from the *here and now* emerges the *other*, otherness, difference. It is these differences that drive most of the spatial connections (which are therefore also social connections) that interest borderology. In this *relacionamiento* (interaction), *transfronterizamiento* occurs, the *transfrontera* is organized, relations are woven on this side of the border, on that side, between here and there, on the border and within it, across the border, from and to the border, above and below it, or around it. So, what is a *frontera*?

## *Frontera or transfrontera?*

Although the lexical repertoire should be expanded to avoid reducing the diversity of spatial connections associated with the border to a single concept (since, if everything is *transfronterizo*, ultimately nothing is), it is essential to acknowledge that this is the category that has ultimately become established. So, how can *frontera* and *transfrontera* be differentiated? The first certainty is that the morpheme *trans-* (like *cis-*, *entre-*, *extra-*, etcetera) cannot be understood without a clear idea of the lexeme, which is the independent part of the word that has its own meaning: *frontera*.

*Frontera* (border) is part of the constellation of geographical concepts encompassed by borderology, that is, those that enable the spatial dimension of the field of observation to be addressed. To consider the border in its inherently spatial condition, one approach to the concept of *space* developed by Milton Santos is useful, structured around four key words: *form*, *function*, *process* and *structure*.

Form is the visible aspect of something. It also refers to the orderly arrangement of objects, a pattern. Taken in isolation, it provides a mere description of phenomena or some of their aspects at a given moment.

Secondly, the function “suggests a task or activity that is expected of a form, person, institution or thing”. Thirdly, the structure implies “the interrelation of all parts of a whole; the mode of organization or construction”. Finally, the process is associated with “a continuous action that develops toward any result, involving concepts of time (continuity and change)” (Santos, 1985, pp. 50-51).

To update this proposal, it is suggested here that the border refers to artifacts and devices (forms), practices and connections (function), multiple scales (structure) and processes.

Borders are artifacts designed to serve a specific purpose, such as walls for defense, signs indicating entry restrictions or bridges that facilitate exchange. In effect, the border is expressed through spatial forms, whether through geophysical units used as material support, marks that indicate its presence or iconography that allows it to be remembered. These artifacts have a specific scope, a sphere of influence in which they manifest themselves both materially and symbolically.

For example, the Berlin Wall not only divided a city and served to inflict violence on those who lived in its vicinity, but also functioned as a global border, dividing the world into two ideological blocs; its reach transcended the local and came to involve the entire planet. Thus, form constitutes the perceptible dimension of the border and its empirical verification, but the border is much more than that.

To answer the question of what a border is, it is useful to consider that the forms mentioned fulfill certain functions. When listing examples of borders, it was inevitable to link form with function: defense, prohibition or promotion. The border has two essential functions: configuration and differentiation. In territorial construction, the artifacts that establish borders facilitate the configuration or cohesion of geographical areas, such as national territories. The second function is separation, differentiation or disjunction from other similar entities. Thus, otherness emerges. Configuration and differentiation usually occur simultaneously.

The border area, which can also be called *transfrontera*, is an inevitable consequence of *frontera*. The border system redefines previous relations and promotes new ones, now *trans-*, *cis-*, *circun-*... *fronterizas*.

Analyzing *fronteras* and *transfronteras* as networks of connections invites reflection on the practices (or courses of action) and the subjects that carry them out. Through countless practices, such as partitioning, circulation, selection, fragmentation and differentiation, society constructs space, provokes conflicts, establishes *fronteras* and configures *transfronteras* over time. As Santos (1996) points out, space can be thought of as an inseparable, interdependent, and contradictory set of objects and actions. Practices are repeated and standardized actions, customary and regulated, learned and taught and situated in a specific space and time.

They also express the multiple strategies deployed by social actors in their quest for the material and symbolic production and reproduction of space (Lefebvre, 1974). It is worth remembering that scientific knowledge is also a practice that participates in the emergence of borders as a social device.

Different spatial practices are present at borders, although some are specific and allow for their sustainability over time. Raffestin (1986) identifies four: *a*) translation, as it is the result of an intention of will and power; *b*) regulation, by delimiting an area where normative autonomy prevails; *c*) differentiation, by establishing an inside and an outside; and *d*) relationship, since the territories and the human groups that inhabit them can establish contacts with other neighbors, whether in relations of opposition, exchange or collaboration. These spatial connections shape cross-border spaces whose extent is not fixed, stable or predetermined. This is where the methodological effort to identify and delimit them comes into play: regionalizing the cross-border and establishing the scope of a phenomenon on both sides, as well as its various possible impacts.

Thirdly, borders are part of more complex structures. These social practices do not occur randomly across or at the border. Social structures put pressure on these spatial practices. Structure implies the interrelation of all parts of a whole. A multiplicity of scales involved in the production of *fronteras* and *transfronteras* can be recognized, which is constantly being updated.

Rather than thinking of territory and borders as unique, clearly defined entities, it is useful to consider the concept of *multiterritoriality* (Haesbaert, 2004) and, by extension, *multiborderity*. It is necessary to reconstruct the network of territorialities and *borderities* that organize society over time. The scale of nation-state territoriality/*borderity* coexists and conflicts with others, such as the territoriality/*borderity* of extractive capital, which finds customs controls to be obstacles to the circulation of consumer goods. The scale of the long process of interstate delimitation coexists with the scales of interpersonal ties and with other extensive scales, such as sociolinguistic ones. These other territorialities define their own borders, have their own scope or delimitation and alter, transform and activate the *borderity* under study. Recognizing the multiplicity of events that occur, intersect and overlap in a given place is essential to understanding social complexity. *Multidimensionality*, *multiscalarity* and, above all, *multiterritoriality* are crucial categories for understanding the plurality of social relations at the border.

It is a methodological predisposition to approach geographical problems from multiple angles, with varying degrees of generalization, which are linked in diverse, contradictory and even chaotic ways. By reconstructing different overlapping relationship networks, each with its own logic and driven by agencies with diverse and conflicting interests, the understanding of any event is enriched. Thus, scale becomes a basic methodological tool for addressing the differences between *fronterizo* and *transfronterizo*.

Finally, borders are not artifacts placed definitively at the margins of a territory: they change and move, along with the practices, connections and scales that subjects construct. For this reason, the term *fronterización* (borderization) has been proposed, reflecting the intrinsically procedural nature of borders, to which the term *transfronterización* should be added. The process by which *fronteras* and *transfronteras* emerge as part of the spatial system and become established in social action and the social imagination can be referred to as institutionalization (Paasi, 1986). The institutionalization of state borders is based on the location of artifacts on the peripheries of the territory, but also on the production of imaginaries from the center of territorial power (the capitals). Like space, borders are immersed in social processes; they are structures that are continually reconstructed through material and symbolic practices, whether by those who erect them, inhabit them, resist them or transgress them.

Borders are often materialized through durable artifacts that transcend the events that gave rise to them. One example is the walls of colonial cities, designed to defend their inhabitants from external threats. Many of these walls have survived and today divide historic heritage sites—highly valued for tourism—from the peripheral areas where the local population resides, creating a new border. Objects and practices are not linearly located in time and space; processes involve continuities, changes and contradictions in the social structure, and are marked by the constant redefinition of scales.

Finally, it is worth revisiting Sack's (1986) now classic proposal for defining territory. To do so, it is necessary first to consider the concept of territoriality, understood as a strategy employed by individuals or groups to affect, influence or control people, phenomena and their relationships by delimiting and controlling a geographical area; that area can be referred to as a territory. What the author calls delimitation can be redefined as *fronterización*. Borderization, which is an essential aspect of territorialization, is a strategy, that is, a plan or course of action guided by interests, wills or desires, aimed at achieving a specific position within a field of relations. Through the placement of certain artifacts (walls, boundaries, signs), the implementation of basic practices for the cohesion and configuration of a spatially differentiated human group, power is exercised to influence or control people, phenomena and relationships in specific geographical areas, called territories (which have their borders and capitals).

By rearranging these ideas, *fronteridad* (borderity) can be understood as an individual or group strategy derived from the interest and desire to control a geographical area, give it unity, separate or differentiate it from others, and then promote or not promote certain relationships through the arrangement of numerous artifacts. Borders (like territories) do not have a fixed genetic makeup, although it is possible to identify (at least in each particular context) the system of practices that, in an almost axiomatic way, constitute the social conditions of possibility for their emergence. The place where these artifacts and relationships are concentrated can be referred to as a border. With a locus on the border and based on the dyad (or possibly triad) of territories that promote it, various networks of relationships emerge and are redefined, conventionally referred to as *transfronterizas*, but which could also be classified as *cisfronterizas*, *adfronterizas*, *defronterizas* and *circunfronterizas*, with multiple and changing scales of execution. Therefore, based on a border, it is restrictive to speak of the *transfrontera* as a single, defined and stable space; therefore, it is more appropriate to speak of *transfronterizaciones*.

## Conclusions

The analysis presented in this study examines the conceptual and lexical complexity of the term *transfronterizo* (cross-border), drawing on a review of various approaches. Through a detailed review of lexical resources, prefixes, suffixes and compositional elements, an expansion of the terminological repertoire is proposed to describe the multiple spatial connections and social relationships that emerge around borders and that have been simplified through the use of a single expression, *transfrontera*.

Borders are social constructs that evolve in tandem with the practices, relations and scales that define them. The concept of *fronterización* (borderization) captures this procedural nature, highlighting that borders and the spaces that are redefined by their presence are continuously constructed and reconstructed through material and symbolic practices, the localization and relocation of new artifacts, the implementation of multiple practices and the interaction of various scales.

As highlighted in this article, the term *transfronterizo* has gained relevance in border studies, although its use is not without ambiguity. In its strict terminological definition, it refers to what happens on the other side of the border. Nevertheless, it often seeks to encompass a broader range of spatial connections that emerge because of, with and despite the border, while omitting others. These connections include everyday interactions, mobility, economic exchanges, cooperation and conflicts, among others.

To address the plurality of connections associated with borders, the creation of neologisms is proposed by combining prefixes and suffixes with the root word *frontera* (border). Terms such as *cisfronterizo* (connections on this side of the border), *adfronterizo* (movements toward the border), *defronterizo* (movements from the border), *circunfronterizo* (movements surrounding the border), and *intrafronterizo* (relationships within the border) allow for a more precise description of the various spatial and social developments that are of interest when analyzing the border as a locus.

Borders and cross-border relations are multidimensional and multiscale phenomena. They cannot be understood from a single perspective but require an approach that considers the interaction of multiple scales (local, national, global) and dimensions (economic, political, cultural). Multiterritoriality and multifrontierism are key concepts for understanding the complexity of spatial connections, not only in the context of nation states, but also of other social entities.

It was also emphasized that it is necessary to clearly differentiate between *fronterizo* (border) and *transfronterizo* (cross-border), which requires an epistemic effort. The choice of words in border studies is not merely a linguistic exercise but has theoretical and methodological implications. The lack of consensus on the definition of terms such as *transfronterizo* and the absence of terminological standardization in the field of borderology sometimes hinders scientific communication and the comparison of studies. It is therefore essential to reflect on the use of terms and to move toward agreed and contextualized definitions to achieve greater communicability of the conceptual proposals of borderology.



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