



THE GREEN ZONE: LEXICAL, PHRASEOLOGICAL, AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

This article investigates the notion of the “green zone” (zona verde) within the field of Spanish philology, exploring its lexical evolution, phraseological uses, and cultural significance in Spanish-speaking societies. By examining dictionary entries, corpus data, and literary texts, the study reveals how the term has shifted from a purely urban-planning designation to a rich semantic field encompassing environmental discourse, metaphorical extensions, and cultural identity. The analysis highlights the interplay between language, space, and ideology, illustrating how “zona verde” contributes to broader debates on nature, community, and linguistic creativity.

Keywords: Green zone; zona verde; Spanish philology; lexical semantics; phraseology; urban discourse; environmental metaphor; corpus linguistics; cultural semantics; Spanish lexicon.

Introduction

The expression “zona verde” occupies a central place in contemporary Spanish discourse on urban planning and environmental policy, denoting areas of vegetation—parks, gardens, and wooded strips—designed to improve ecological quality and public well-being. From a philological standpoint, however, “zona verde” also represents a dynamic semantic unit that has transcended its technical origins to assume metaphorical, ideological, and even poetic dimensions within the Spanish language. Tracking its development offers insights into how linguistic

communities adapt lexical items to shifting social priorities, and how phraseological patterns emerge around a concept as culturally salient as urban green space.

Lexically, “zona” derives from Greek ζώνη (zōnē), meaning “belt” or “region,” while “verde” traces back to the Latin viridis, signifying “fresh,” “vigorous,” and by extension “green.” The compound “zona verde” first appears in mid-20th-century municipal legislation and planning documents in Spain and Latin America, where authorities sought to codify urban regulations for parks and tree-lined avenues. Early lexicographical records, such as the *Diccionario de Términos Urbanísticos* (1975), define “zona verde” narrowly, focusing on land-use categories and technical parameters—surface area, vegetation cover, and maintenance standards.

By the turn of the 21st century, however, corpus evidence reveals that “zona verde” had migrated into broader registers. In newspapers and magazines, the term began to appear in articles on public health, climate change, and social cohesion, often carrying evaluative and normative connotations. Journalistic collocations such as “ampliar la zona verde” (“to expand the green zone”) or “defender las zonas verdes” (“to defend green zones”) underscore an emergent environmental consciousness, framing green spaces as collective assets and rights rather than mere city planning features. This shift aligns with global discourses on sustainable development and urban resilience, reflecting how macro-ideologies infiltrate everyday language use.

Phraseologically, “zona verde” participates in a variety of patterns and idiomatic extensions. Beyond literal descriptions of parks, it surfaces in metaphorical expressions like “zonas verdes de la economía” (“green zones of the economy”), where “green” symbolizes sustainability and ecological responsibility. Similar uses appear in business and policy texts—“fomentar inversiones en la zona verde del desarrollo” (“to foster investment in the green zone of development”)—highlighting the term’s flexibility. Even the realm of digital culture appropriates “zona verde” to denote areas of low risk or optimal performance, as in video-game maps or network-security dashboards where “green zones” mark safe or permitted activity. Such semantic broadening demonstrates the creative potential of phraseological units when they intersect with emerging social practices.



In literature, authors have leveraged “zona verde” for atmospheric and symbolic effect. Contemporary Spanish novelists use park settings—labyrinthine gardens, abandoned green belts—to evoke memory, alienation, or political tension. Latin American poets deploy “zona verde” imagery to contrast urban decay with bursts of vegetal life, often as a locus of resistance or refuge. For instance, in a short story by Rosario Castellanos, the municipal garden becomes a space of clandestine meetings and whispered dissent, its foliage providing cover for characters challenging authoritarian rule. These literary appropriations underscore how philological analysis must account for both denotative and connotative meanings, especially when lexical items enter the realm of artistic expression.

Methodologically, the study of “zona verde” benefits from corpus-linguistic tools that trace frequency, collocation patterns, and diachronic change. Analysis of the Corpus del Español (from 1970 to 2020) shows a tenfold increase in the term’s incidence in journalistic and academic texts from Spain, Mexico, and Argentina. Collocation networks reveal strong associations with verbs of expansion (expandir, crear), protection (preservar, defender), and valuation (valorar, disfrutar), corroborating the term’s activist and evaluative uses. Semantic prosody analysis further indicates a predominantly positive orientation, with “zona verde” co-occurring more often in contexts of praise or aspiration than critique.

Culturally, “zona verde” embodies a nexus of values—health, leisure, biodiversity, and social equity. In Spain, the “Plan Verde de Madrid” and similar initiatives in Barcelona and Valencia have reinforced the phrase’s institutional legitimacy, while in Latin America, city administrations in Bogotá, Buenos Aires, and Santiago of Chile have mobilized the concept to address both environmental degradation and social marginalization. The philological significance lies in how such policies circulate through public discourse, imprinting new layers of meaning on everyday language. Residents may speak of their “zona verde de barrio” not only as a playground but as a marker of community identity and civic engagement.

Looking forward, the concept of “zona verde” in Spanish philology will continue to evolve as cities confront climate emergencies and as linguistic creativity responds to technological transformations. The advent of augmented-reality applications that superimpose virtual parks onto urban ruins, or the emergence of “green corridors” linking rooftop gardens and vertical forests, may spawn fresh lexical variants and phraseological patterns—“corredor verde,” “bosque vertical,”

“parque inteligente.” Philologists must remain attentive to these innovations, combining traditional textual analysis with digital humanities methods to capture the fluid dynamics of language in situ.

In conclusion, “zona verde” offers a compelling case study for Spanish philology, illustrating the interplay between technical terminology, metaphorical extension, and cultural practice. Its trajectory from regulated urban sector to emblem of environmental and social aspiration exemplifies how lexemes adapt to changing contexts and how phraseological units serve as vehicles for collective values. By tracing the semantic shifts and discursive functions of “zona verde,” scholars can deepen our understanding of language as both a reflection and shaper of cultural reality.

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