Adpositions
Niina Ning Zhang Nov. 2013


Comments are welcome.

Adposition is a general term to cover preposition, postposition, and circumposition. A preposition precedes its NP complement, a postposition follows its NP complement, and the two parts of a circumposition precedes and follows an NP, respectively. This entry addresses the issue whether Chinese has prepositions and postpositions in Part I and Part II, respectively, and gives a couple of examples to show the possible existence of circumpositions in the language.

Part I Prepositions
1.1 Preposition as an independent category

Chinese has many unambiguous prepositions. Some examples in Mandarin Chinese are listed in (1) (see Chao 1968:768-769) (all Chinese examples in this entry are from this variety of the language).

(1) chú-le 除了 ‘except for, besides, in addition’
    cóng  從 ‘from’
    duìyú  對於 ‘with regard to, of’
    guānyú  關於 ‘about, concerning, with regard to’
    wèi  爲 ‘for (the sake of), on behalf of’
    wèi-le  爲了 ‘because of, for (the sake of), in order to’
The language also has many prepositions which share their forms with verbs, as shown in (2) (see Chao 1968:768-769).

(2) Prep 当(zhe) ‘in front of, at’; Verb 当 ‘serve as, consider as; think, believe’
Prep 到 ‘until, to’; Verb 到 ‘arrive’
Prep 对 ‘to, of’; Verb 对 ‘be opposite’
Prep 给 ‘to, for’; Verb 给 ‘give’
Prep 在 ‘in, at’; Verb 在 ‘be at’

Prepositions in Chinese share properties with prepositions in other languages, and these properties distinguish them from nouns, verbs, and adjectives. First, unlike nouns, they may not function as arguments.

(3) *王冕喜歡從。

*Wángmiǎn xǐhuān cóng
Wangmian like from

Second, unlike other lexical categories, no preposition alone may function as a predicate (Chao 1968:750).
Third, prepositions form a closed class. If we add the ones like those in (1) and (2) together, we get less than 40 prepositions, which is still much fewer than those in English. “English is rumored to have on the order of fifty prepositions, as compared to its thousands of verbs, nouns, and adjectives” (Baker 2003:304).

These properties show that prepositions form an independent category. Based on the parallel distinctive properties in English and other languages, Baker (2003) treats prepositions as a functional category, similar to case-markers, complementizers, or determiners. Like these functional categories, prepositions must take a phrase as its complement (also see McCawley 1992:219).

Hockett et al (1945:18) use the term ‘co-verb’ to cover both words like those in (1) and the dual status words like those in (2). The term has led some scholars to believe that there is no real preposition in the language (e.g. Thompson 1970:15-16). Li and Thompson (1974) made an early effort to argue for the existence of prepositions in the language. First, forms like those in (1) have no match to verbs (Li and Thompson 1974:262-263; 271). The existence of these forms does not support the belief that there is no preposition in Chinese, even though Ross (1984, 1991) claims that words like those in (2) are simply verbs.

Second, most prepositions do not have aspect markers, but a couple of them do; however, the aspect markers in the latter type of prepositions do not encode aspect
information at all (Li and Thompson 1974:262; 267). For instance, the le in wèi-le ‘because of, for (the sake of), on behalf of, in order to’ does not express a perfective aspect (McCawley 1992:225). Such prepositions are similar to the English prepositions concerning and regarding, which also have aspect-like suffix -ing (McCawley 1992:224). In contrast, an aspect marker with a verb always expresses certain temporal or mirative information (see Zhang 2013 for the latter use of aspect markers).

Li and Thompson (1974:270-271) present further contrasts between the preposition use and the verb use of the same form, in relativization with a resumptive pronoun and in its semantic interactions with other elements of a sentence. See Ross (1984: 13) for further discussion of the issue.

Note that A-not-A question-formation is not a reliable test to distinguish verbs from prepositions, since it may apply to a non-adverb element at the left edge of a predicate (Ross 1991: 83; McCawley 1992:216, 217).

(5) 你從沒從上海去過台北？

Ni còng-méi-cóng Shànghǎi qù-guò Táiběi?

2SG from-not-from Shanghai go-EXP Taipei

‘Have you travelled to Taipei from Shanghai?’

1.2 Some properties of prepositions in Mandarin Chinese

The object of a preposition in Mandarin Chinese may not be empty, unlike that of some prepositions in English (Chao 1968:751; McCawley 1992:220-222). Compare (6b) and (7c).
(6) a. In which year were you born?

b. Which year were you born in __?  (Huddleston & Pullum 2002:631)

(7) a. 你在哪一年出生？

Nǐ zài nǎ yī nián chūshēng?
2SG at which one year born
‘In which year were you born?’

b. 在哪一年你出生？

Zài nǎ yī nián nǐ chūshēng?
at which one year 2SG born
‘In which year were you born?’

c. *哪一年你在 _ 出生？

Nǎ yī nián nǐ zài _ chūshēng?
which one year 2SG at born

Note that although extraction from a modifier is not possible, it is possible in PP examples such as (6b), assuming that the preposition has undergone head movement (Bošković 2011; Stepanov 2012:683; also see Hornstein and Weinberg 1981 for a reanalysis approach).

The preposition dui ‘to’ may introduce the object of a nominalized transitive verb, like of in English (Huang et al 2009:31). In (8a), the object of the verb rùqīn ‘invade’ follows the verb. In (8b), the same verb follows de and is thus nominalized. In this case the preposition dui licenses the preverbal position of the object of the nominalized verb.
(8) a. 敵人入侵了那個國家。
    Dirén rûqīn-le nà-ge gúojiā
    Enemy invade-PERF that-CLF country
    ‘The enemy invaded that country.’

b. 敵人*(對)那個國家的入侵
    dírén *(duì) nà-ge gúojiā de rùqīn
    enemy to that-CLF country SUB invasion
    ‘the invasion of that country by the enemy’

Unlike *duì, the causative marker bā and the passive marker bèi are not prepositions, and they do not form a constituent with the NP to their immediate right (Huang et al. 2009:28; contra Chao 1968:769; Li and Thompson 1974; Lü et al. 1980; McCawley 1992:225)

Part II Bound localizers: Postpositions or light nouns

2.1 Bound localizers

If a post-nominal form denotes a locative relation or an abstract (e.g. domain, time) relation, such as shàngmiàn in (9a), or shàng in (9b) through (9d), it is called fāngwèicí (方位詞), translated as localizer (Chao 1968:397; McCawley 1992:211, 228), or locative particle (Li & Thompson 1981:390; McCawley 1989:26).
It is generally recognized that if a localizer is disyllabic, it can be a relational noun (e.g., Ernst 1988:223; Huang et al. 2009:19), and if it is monosyllabic, it is a bound form (Chao 1968:397, 620). Although the language does have monosyllabic free forms such as shui ‘water’ in (10b), a monosyllabic localizer, such as li ‘in’ in (10a) (Liu 1998:51), is not free.
Morphologically, a bound localizer is analyzed as a component of a nominal compound in Chao (1968:397). However, Chao’s (1968:621) following example shows that the morphological host of a bound localizer can be a phrase. Data like (11) lead Liu (1998:57) to claim that bound localizers are enclitics.


Categorically, bound localizers have been analyzed as either nominals or postpositions.
2.2 The nominal analysis of bound localizers

Many scholars treat bound localizers as certain version of nominals: postnominal nominal auxiliary (助名詞) in Ōta (1958 [2003:93]), noun in McCawley (1989:26; 1992:229-231) and Li (1990), nominal enclitic in Zhang (2002), light noun in Huang (2009:98), and “deviate” noun in Huang et al. (2009:16). They show that the combination of an NP and a bound localizer occurs in the positions that allow an NP, but reject other categories. Some of the positions are listed in Table 1 (see Li 1990:30 for more constructions to show the contrasts). The examples in (12) show that the combination of an NP and a bound localizer may occur in the positions, and the examples in (13) show that an NP, but not a PP, may occur in the same positions.

Table 1. Distributions of [NP+localizer], compared to NP and PP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NP</th>
<th>NP+localizer</th>
<th>Preposition+NP</th>
<th>observation made by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gěi _</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Zhang (2002:58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_ kàngilái</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Zhang (2002:58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prep _</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Ernst (1988:230)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(12) a. 孩子們把家裡弄得很好看。

Háizi-men bā jīa-lǐ nòng-de hèn hǎo-kàn.

child-PL BA home-inside make-DE very good-look

‘The children made the house beautiful.’
b. 家裡被孩子們弄得亂七八糟。

Jīa-lǐ bèi háizi-men nòng-de luàńqiībāzāo.
‘The house was made messy by the children.’

c. 他給所裡買了一台電腦。

Ta gěi sūo-lǐ mǎi-le yī-tái diànnǎo.
‘He bought a computer for the institute.’

d. 街上看起來很熱鬧。

Jiē-shàng kànqǐllái hěn rènào.
‘The street looks very lively.’

e. 貓從門後跑出來。

Māo cóng mén-hòu pǎo chūlái.
‘The cat ran out from the back of the door.’

(13) a. 孩子們把(*在)家弄得很好看。

háizi-men bá (*zài) jīa-lǐ nòng-de hěn hǎo-kàn.
‘The children-made the house very good-looking.’

b. (*在)我們家被孩子們弄得亂七八糟。

(*Zài) wǒmén jīa bèi háizi-men nòng-de lùàńqiībāzāo.
‘Our home was made messy by the children.’
These examples show that the distribution of the combination of an NP and a bound localizer patterns with that of an NP, rather than that of the combination of a preposition and an NP. Assuming a postpositional phrase has the same distributions as a prepositional phrase, the observed pattern does not support the postposition analysis of bound localizers. Also, as predicted and illustrated by the scholars mentioned in Table 1, if a preposition such as "at" occurs to the left of the NP-localizer combination, the result is also unacceptable, e.g. (14) vs. (12a).

(14) *孩子們把在家裡弄得很好看。

*Háizi-men bǎ zài jiā-lǐ nòng-de hěn haǒkăn.

2.3 The postposition analysis of bound localizers

The postposition analysis of bound localizers is proposed in Peyraube (1980:78), Ernst
(1988), and Djamouri et al. (2013), among others. One of their arguments is that the functional particle *de* may occur between two nominals, but not between a noun and a bound localizer (Ernst 1988:222). The examples in (15) are from Lû et al. (1980:424).

(15) a. 池塘的旁邊
   chítáng de pánɡbiān
   pond SUB side
   ‘the sides of the pond’

b. 池塘(*的)旁
   chítang (*de) pánɡ
   pond SUB side

Huang’s (2009:118) explanation of the constraint is that *de* itself is an enclitic, and thus it is unable to host a bound localizer, which is also an enclitic. This explanation is weak, since a clitic may be hosted by a cluster that is composed of another clitic and its host (e.g., both ‘*d* and ‘*ve are clitics and the latter is hosted by *I’d in I’d’ve brought some for you, if I’d known*). Huang et al.’s (2009:17) account for the constraint is that bound localizers are “deviate” nouns. Recall that such elements form a closed class. In this sense, they are different from normal nouns, which form an open class. Huang et al. do not specify the nature of the deviation. But Huang’s (2009) light noun analysis may explain the constraint. Semantically, bound localizers denote relations, taking the associate NP as their argument. Light nouns, like light verbs, are semi-functional elements, heading an extended projection of the same category as their complement. Zhang (1999) argues that the syntactic status of *de* in a nominal is a realization of n. If *de* and a bound localizer
have the same syntactic position, they may not be base-generated side by side.

Another argument for the postposition analysis of bound localizers is that a preposition in the language may not be stranded (see (7c)), and similarly, a bound localizer may not have a silent NP to its left (Ernst 1988:230; Djamouri et al. 2013:Sec. 2.1). However, a localizer may have a null argument to its left, if there is an element available to its left to be its phonological host. In (16) (see Ross 1991: 91 (25) and Huang et al. 2009:20 for more examples), the argument of ʂàŋ ‘on’ is null, and the localizer is cliticized on the preposition cónɡ ‘from’.

(16) 他從上跳下來。

Tā cónɡ ʂàŋ tiào-xiàlái

3SG from  on  jump-down

‘He jumped down from a place above.’

If the distribution contrasts in Table 1 are ignored, all enclitics can be treated as postpositions, including the functional particle  de.

2.4 The syntactic structure of a construction with both a preposition and a localizer

From a typological perspective, Zhang (2002) argues that locative prepositions such as ʐài, cónɡ, wānɡ denote a pure spatial relation, and localizers such as ʂàŋ and qiàn denote a place value, with respect to a locative reference, which is expressed by the associate NP. She further argues that cross-linguistically, there are two levels of complementation structure for a locative PP, a bound localizer heads the lower one and the preposition heads the higher one, and the NP is base-generated as the complement of
the localizer, moving to the left of the localizer in the language. For instance, the PP in (17a) has the structure in (17b).

(17) a. 貓 [從桌子上] 跳下來。
   Māo [cóng zhuōzi-shāng] tiào xiálái.
   cat from table-on jump down
   ‘The cat jumped down from the table.’

b. [cóng [zhuōzī [shāng tǐ]]]

A similar two-layer complementation structure for locative PPs is seen in Huang (2009:99) for Mandarin Chinese, and in Svenoneous (2007), among others, for other languages. Zhang further argues that behind in (18b) is base-generated at the same position as a localizer.

(18) a. There is a cat behind the table.

b. A cat appeared from behind the table.

Chinese localizers are similar to the post-nominal localizers in some Khoisan languages, which exhibit nominal inflections and are thus nominals (Collins 2001:463-464). In both languages, the combined meaning of a locative preposition and a localizer may be expressed by a single locative preposition, such as behind in (18a), in English. English locative prepositions in such examples are thus hybrid, or less analytical (Baker 2003:305 fn. 1).

Zhang (2002) further discusses why two locative prepositions may occur in a row in
(18b), but not in Chinese (e.g. (13e)), and cross-linguistic constraints on the cooccurrence
(pace Ernst 1988:231 and Djamouri et al. 2013:Sec. 2.3). However, a non-locative
preposition may be followed by another preposition in the language, as seen in the string
chú-le cóng ‘beside from’ in (19).

(19) 除了從日本，我們也可以從韓國招生。

Chú-le cóng Riběn, wǒ-men yě kěyí cóng Hánguó zhāo-shēng.
beside from Japan 1PL also can from Korea call-student
‘Besides from Japan, we can also enroll students from Korea.’

If a localizer is not a bound form, such as shàngfāng in (20), it can be modified by
zhèng ‘exact’. The preposition behind in (18a) can also be modified by right. Locative
prepositions in Mandarin Chinese may not be modified. If zhèng ‘exact’ precedes cóng
‘from’ in (17a), it denotes a progress aspect, rather than modifying the PP.

(20) 床正上方有一個氣球。

Chuáng zhèng shàngfāng yǒu yī-ge qìqiú.
bed exact above have one-CLF balloon
‘There is a balloon right above the bed.’

Part III  Possible circumpositions
Mandarin Chinese also has a few constructions in which an NP is both preceded by a
preposition and followed by a post-position-like element, such as {cóng/zì/yóu} ...
{qǐ/yǐlái} ({從/自/由} ... {起/以來}) ‘from ... on’ and duì ... làishuō (對 ... 來說) ‘to’.
Liu (2003) calls such constructions circumposition constructions.

(21) 從明天起
    cóng míngtiān qī
    from tomorrow
    ‘from tomorrow on’

In such constructions, at least one of the two functional elements is obligatory. In (21), qī ‘on’ is obligatory.

(22) *從明天
    *cóng míngtiān
    *from tomorrow

Moreover, neither of the two functional elements can be freely replaced by other elements. Lǔ et al (1980) treat the use of qī in (21) as a verb, meaning ‘start’. But like PPs and unlike VPs, the phrases in (21) function as adverbials rather than independent predicates. Also, unlike a verb, qī in this use never has an aspect marker.

References
Bošković, Željko, “Rescue by PF deletion, traces as (non)interveners, and the that-trace effect”, *Linguistic Inquiry* 42/1, 2011, 1-44.


Svenonius, Peter, “Adpositions, particles, and the arguments they introduce”, in: Eric


