This paper explores the syntactic structure of spatial adpositions in Mandarin building on Li’s (1985) proposal and applying the cartographic approach from Svenonius (2008). Chinese spatial adpositions have been widely discussed. Svenonius (2007) believes that there is no spatial prepositions like up, down, behind, and below that express spatial relations in Mandarin. Po-Ching and Rimmington (2004), on the other hand, posit a set of spatial postpositions, including shang ‘above’, xia ‘below’, li ‘inside’, wai ‘outside’, qian ‘in front of’, hou ‘behind’, zuo ‘left’, and you ‘right’, which often occur with a special group of suffixes. However, these analyses do not provide an account for the syntactic structure.

Li (1985) observes that Chinese contains both “true PP” and “nominals in disguise”. Prepositions like wei ‘for’, and cong ‘from’ are so-called “true PP” while words like shang ‘surface’ and wai ‘outside/exterior’ are actually locative nominals. These nominals can occur freely with place noun like mian ‘side’ and become subjects in the sentence. The following example presents that the location DP (in boldface) is the subject. The place noun mian ‘side’ alone cannot be the subject.

(1) shangmian/*mian hen ganjing
   Upper-side very clean
   ‘The surface is very clean’

Svenonius (2008) has proposed a fine-grained framework of spatial prepositions in English. He suggests that Place can be decomposed into categories like K, Axial Parts and the DP complement. K is demonstrated by a genitive case marker, and the Axial Part (AxPart) is a lexical component which denotes the frames of reference. This analysis can also be used for the internal structure of Chinese spatial adpositions.

(2) tamen place [zai [kp fangzi K/de] AxPart[houmian]] xiuli dianshiji
   they loc house gen back-side repair television
   ‘They repair televisions behind their house’ (Adapted from Svenonius, 2007:70)

The PlaceP [zai fangzi houmian] ‘behind the house’ in the above example can be decomposed into a locative preposition zai ‘loc’, an AxPartP which dominates a KP and the AxPart houmian ‘back-side’. Inside the KP, it is a null genitive case marker K/de and its DP complement fangzi ‘house’. K can be either null as K or overt as de.

Paths adpositions are more complicated in Chinese. Like English, cong ‘from’, dao ‘to’ and null TO are also three elements in Chinese spatial adposition. Other than these, some path elements seem to be ambiguous between particle of the verb and a path preposition.

(3) chuan hua-(guo) qiao xia(mian)
   boat sail-pass bridge bottom
   ‘The boat sailed under the bridge’

In the example (3) above, the Axial Part xia(mian) ‘bottom’ itself cannot denote Path reading. Assuming guo ‘pass’ as a verb particle leads to the dilemma that both Path and Place are structurally null because the optionally directed verb hua ‘sail’ itself does not denote Path, either. I propose that guo ‘pass’ is based-generalized at the Path position and it later moves to the verb root hua ‘sail’ to form the verb hua-guo ‘sail-pass’.

In conclusion, this paper provides a new analysis on the syntactic structure of spatial adpositions in Mandarin, as well as the properties of Paths and Place. It reveals a novel relation between P and N, as well as P and V, and it also contributes to the studies of Paths and Place.
Bibliography


