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Remarks on the typology of adpositions

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1) Case or adposition? In less-than-fully synthetic languages, adpositions are in general assumed to express ‘case relations’ like GEN(ITIVE), DAT(IVE), BEN(E-/MALEFACTIVE), INS(TRUMENTAL), COM(ITATIVE) as well as the standard spatial relations LOC(ATIVE), ALL(ATIVE), ABL(ATIVE). By contrast, such meanings as ‘between’ or ‘regardless of’, for instance, are no longer thought of as ‘case relations’, regardless of how they happen to be expressed. It goes without saying that the ‘affix vs. adposition’ distinction is bound to be arbitrary to some extent (cf. Creissels 2009: 610–611), just like the ‘adposition vs. lexical item’ distinction.

2) DeLancey (1997: 53): “It is by now clear that adpositions derive from exactly two sources: [A] serial verb constructions (or some functional equivalent) and [B] relation nouns constructions.” These two options will now be illustrated with examples from Yoruba, namely in addition to the two ‘adpositions proper’, i.e. *ní* (‘in’, ‘at’) and *sí* (‘to’) (cf. Rowlands 1969):

- A) i) ‘give’ > DAT/BEN: *ó fún mi ní owó* (> *lówó*) = (s)he **gave** me money → *ó rà á fún mi* = (s)he bought it **to** me
ii) ‘take’/‘put’ > INS: *ó fi òbe sí ilè* (> *sílè*) = (s)he **put** the knife onto the ground → *ó fi òbe gé eja* = (s)he cut the fish **with** a knife
iii) ‘meet’ > COM: *ó bá mi ní oko* (> *lóko*) = (s)he **met** me at the farm → *ó bá mi lo* = (s)he went **with** me ~ *ó bá mi rà aso* = (s)he bought cloths **from** me ~ *ó bá mi sòrò* = (s)he spoke **to** me.

Notice, in particular, the following continuum of grammaticalization of *fún* (with increasing ‘semantic bleaching’): ... > *ó gbé e wá fún mi* ([s]he brought it [= ‘lift it come’] **to** me) > *ó so fún mi pé ...* ([s]he said **to** me that ...) > *ó fún mi lówó fún iyá mi* ([s]he gave me money **for** my mother) > *owó wà fún mi* (there is money **for** me) > *aso wà fún títà* (there are clothes **for** selling) > *ó sá fún mi* ([s]he ran away **from** me).

B) *inú* = ‘belly’ > ‘inside’, *orí* = ‘head’ > ‘on (top of)’, *ara* = ‘body’ > ‘on (the surface of)’; N1 N2-GEN = N1 ∅ N2: *nínu ilé* = ‘in the belly of the house’ > ‘in(side) the house’; similarly: *sínú ilé* = ‘into the house’, *lóri/sóri àpóti* = ‘on/onto the box’, *lára/ara ògiri* = ‘on the wall’. As summarized by Heine & Reh (1985: 101): “Most, if not all, African languages use the [metaphorical] transfer strategy to express prepositional concepts by means of genitive constructions.”.

3) On the face of it, however, DeLancey’s characterization seems too narrow. What about such prepositional constructions as *Vu son âge, il a réussi assez bien*

or *Considering his age, he has succeeded rather well?* Or consider the ABL of Modern Tamil, e.g. *maratt-ile-runtu* where the original syntactic construction is still transparent: ‘tree-place-having.been’ (e.g. ‘He fell from a tree’ < ‘He fell having been in a tree’). But perhaps the notion of “functional equivalent of serial verb construction” should be understood in a sense wide enough to subsume these cases as well?

4) It is quite normal that languages are claimed to have only one adposition or no adpositions at all. Are these claims literally true? And if they are, what are the alternative (= functionally equivalent) means of expression? Let us single out two languages, i.e. Wari’, an Amazonian language (cf. Everett & Kern 1997), and Diyari, an Australian language (cf. Austin 1980).

5) **Wari’** has only one genuine preposition, which inflects in person, number, and (in the third person) gender. The two most important (= Subject – Object) arguments of the finite verb are expressed by a bipartite postverbal clitic, and the third argument is expressed by the preposition:

mao ina-in nahwarak = go I-it jungle = I went into the jungle
 to’ ina-on tarama’ = hit I-him man = I hit the man
 mi’ ina-on **kon** hwam tarama’ = give I-him PREP.M fish man = I gave the fish to the man
 kerek pe ina-on tarama’ **pain** nahwarak = see be I-him man PREP.N jungle = I saw the man in the jungle

More specific spatial relations are expressed by (directional verbs and) body-part words in GEN constructions, which conform to the B-option in Yoruba:

mao na-in chirim = go (s)he-it house = (s)he went to the house
korom mao na-in chirim = **enter** go (s)he-it house = (s)he went into the house
korom mao na-in **tekipa-in** chirim = **enter** (s)he-it **throat-its** house = (s)he went inside the house
 pe na-in **kima-in** chirim = be (s)he-it **chest-its** house = (s)he is in front of the house
 pe na-in **wara-in** chirim = be (s)he-it **back-its** house = (s)he is behind the house

In the last three examples the clitic (*tekipa-/kima-/wara*)-**in** is the genitive marker (= 3SG.N) of *chirim*, while the homophonous OBJ clitic (*na*)-**in** agrees with the body-part word *tekima/kima/wara(-in)*.

6) “Most Australian languages do not have adpositions” (Dixon 2002: 131). Thus, Austin’s (1980) grammar of **Diyari** contains no section devoted to adpositions. But is the claim true? In Diyari “uninflected adjectives” (Austin, pp. 106–112) or “modifying nouns” (Dixon, p. 149) function as adverbs that specify

the general meaning of the LOC case (e.g. *miri* = ‘top’ and *thati* = ‘middle’). But they can also be interpreted as incipient forms of adpositions:

- (1) Nhawu **miri** karri-yi pirta-nhi
He above climb-PRES tree-LOC
He climbs up in the tree
- (2) Nhawu karri-yi [pirta **miri**]-nhi
- (3) Nhawu karri-yi pirta **miri**.

In (1) *miri* is an adverb, in (2) it is an (adjectival) modifier of *pirta*, and in (3), connected with the absolutive form *pirta-∅*, it functions as a prima facie postposition. The same construction occurs e.g. in the sentence *Pu a-∅ thati thudu∅ rdada-yi* = (X) hut-ABS middle fire-ABS make-PRES = (X) makes fire in the middle of the hut. — Spatial relations like ‘into’ and ‘around’ are expressed by combining LOC with auxiliary directional verbs ‘enter’ and ‘circumvent’ (cf. *Wari*). Meanings like ‘located in N’, ‘(associated) with N’, and ‘without N’ are expressed by constructions *N-x* and *N + X*, where *-x* is a derivational affix and *X* is an adjective.

7) All these examples can also be found in Itkonen (2005). An analogy is established in Itkonen (2008) between the five-case noun morphology of *Diyari* and that of Proto-Uralic (as reconstructed by Korhonen 1996).

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