Space in Languages of China
Dan Xu
Editor

Space in Languages of China

Cross-linguistic, Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives

Springer
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Preface

This collective work began in 2004 thanks to Grant Number 03326 awarded by the Research Department of the French Government to the project entitled *L’Espace et ses représentations en Asie orientale à travers divers langages*. The participants are from universities and institutions in several countries, working in various domains. They all have the same strong interest: investigating ‘Space’ in languages of China. Over the past decade, this topic has been the subject of debate in many disciplines including linguistics and psychology, but there have so far been few studies of Chinese and related languages.

My gratitude goes to the authors, who have supported this project and given their contributions to this book. Our collaboration over the years has been enjoyable and fruitful. We have shared our experiences and exchanged our points of view, which are not always the same. Without their indispensable help and constructive observations, this book would never have been completed.

Many thanks to Craig Baker for his efficient help with editing work in English. I take responsibility for any remaining mistakes.

Dan Xu
Paris
INTRODUCTION: HOW CHINESE STRUCTURES SPACE

Dan Xu
INALCO/CRLAO, France

Space has long been a popular topic in linguistic research. Numerous books on the subject have been published over the past decade. However, none of these books were based on linguistic data from Chinese. The Chinese language is an “atypical” SVO language and deserves more attention and study. In this volume, contributors working in different specialties present and analyze the expression of space in languages of China. Not only Mandarin Chinese (the standard language) is investigated; several other dialects, as well as a minority language of China and Chinese Sign Language are studied. Cross-linguistic, synchronic and diachronic approaches are used to investigate phenomena related to space. This work does not claim to challenge or revise ongoing theoretical proposals, since the contributors are aware that problems explaining the expressions of space in Chinese have been largely neglected in past research. Even the available data is not very well described. In this book, we try to provide general linguists and those who are interested in the Chinese language with a reliable presentation and description of spatial expressions in Chinese. The papers collected here are empirical, descriptive and sometimes tentative. Our aim throughout has been to stimulate discussion rather than to offer solutions.

In this book, some contributors focus on spatial structures, while others concentrate on spatial terms. In section 1 of the Introduction, the language situation in China is presented. Then, we introduce some important recent debates about the Chinese language. Finally, we give a summary of the articles which study the expression of space using different approaches. As the contributing scholars argue, Chinese shares many common features with other languages, but also presents some particular properties.

1. Language Situation in China

What does “Chinese” mean? It is not easy to give a short answer. The language situation in China is very complex, not only for those who do not know this language, but also for linguists who have been working on it for many years.

Generally speaking, “Chinese” refers to Mandarin, or rather the “standard language” based on Beijing dialect, which is spoken on TV. In almost every province, educated people are bilingual; they speak a dialect and the standard language. Most people can at least understand Mandarin. The Chinese dialects are classified into ten groups:

1) Mandarin: mainly spoken in north of the Yangtze River, and in southern provinces including Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou, etc. More than 662 million people speak Mandarin.
(2) Jin: spoken in Shanxi province and zones contiguous with this province, for instance some regions of Hebei, Inner Mongolia, Henan and Shaanxi. (45 million)
(3) Wu: spoken in Shanghai, Zhejiang, etc. (69 million)
(4) Min: distributed in Fujian, Taiwan, etc. (55 million)
(5) Hui: attested in Huizhou, Anhui province. (3 million)
(6) Gan: spoken in Jiangxi. (31 million)
(7) Hakka: located in zones between Fujian, Guangdong and Jiangxi. (35 million)
(8) Yue: used in Guangdong, Guangxi, Hongkong, Macao. (40 million)
(9) Xiang: spoken in Hunan. (30 million)
(10) Pinghua: found in Guangxi. (2 million).

While people in the North understand each other when they travel across provinces, people in the South cannot communicate easily when they visit a neighboring village. Cantonese is almost as much a “foreign language” for people from Beijing as the Breton language (spoken in Bretagne of France) is for people from Paris. In other words, the mutual intelligeability among Chinese dialects is low. In the South, ancient Chinese pronunciation is better preserved. The evolution source has been in the North, since most capitals in history were located in the North. However, a common cultural and historical background, as well as the same written form, have united the different ethnic groups and dialects for millennia. Recent excavated texts from different provinces show us that as early as the Warring States period (475–221 BC), a large majority of the written forms were similar and had the same origin; only some particles had variant forms. Unfortunately, we do not know their pronunciation since Chinese characters do not directly reflect sounds. Nevertheless, researchers have attempted to reconstruct them using the Qièyùn, the first rime dictionary from 601 BC, the Shījīng (Odes) dated from around the eleventh to sixth centuries BC, and phonetic series of characters (see Karlgren, 1957, Fanggui Li, 1980, Pulleyblank, 1991, Baxter, 1992, Sagart, 1999 among others). Works based on these three data sources, especially the eminent research of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) scholars, clearly describe the pronunciation around the time of the Qièyùn. The reconstruction of Old Chinese (11th century BC to first century AD) began in the last century. As expected, there are still many problems and divergent points of view.

The complexity of the Chinese languages is evidently due not only to the vast geographic region where they are spoken; the long time period for which data is available means that assigning different time periods to the history of Chinese is also often a subject of debate. The earliest texts, divinatory texts inscribed on bones and shells (usually called “inscriptions on bones”), can be traced back to the 14th century BC. The style of characters changed over time, but the continuity of the writing system is evident. Scholars working on phonology and syntax, including the contributors to this book, often have different points of view on the division of the history of Chinese into time periods.

Scholars generally agree that Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family. However, comparative studies “are still at a relatively primitive level” (Norman, 1988, 13); many problems remain unclear and data is unavailable for many languages. Comparative methods used for Indo-European languages sometimes cannot be used because descriptions of languages are incomplete or non-existent. Moreover, investigation of the Sino-Tibetan family is much more complex than Indo-European, because a large portion of the languages have been never investigated and have never had written forms. These non-Han language speakers have permanent contact with Han people (Chinese people) in the South and Southwest. This situation also causes complication in the dialects. Geneticists propose a continuous southward movement of Han people. Southward migrations “occurred during almost all periods in the past two millennia” (Bo Wen et al. 2004, 304). “Studies on classical genetic markers and microsatellites show that the Han people, like East Asians, are divided into two genetically differentiated groups, northern Han and southern Han, separated approximately by the Yangtze river.” (302). Their genetic observation suggests that the Chinese dialects in the North may be less heterogeneous than those in the south. The vast regions of the North have had language contact with the Altaic languages: Mongolian within China, and Manchu spoken in some villages in Heilongjiang province, while in the south contact has been with the Tibeto-Burman family in the West and Southwest, and the Miao-Yao and Tai languages in the South. This presents an intricate situation. The geneticists conclude that “the massive movement of the northern immigrants led to a change in genetic makeup in southern China, and resulted in the demographic expansion of Han people as well as their culture” (304).

Tone systems are characteristic of Chinese and many other Asian languages. However “there is now considerable evidence to suggest that the various tone systems within Sino-Tibetan may not be directly cognate, i.e. that tone systems have developed independently in various branches of the family.” (DeLancey, 1987, 805). The rise of the tone system in Chinese was partially caused by the loss of voiced stops. This process was repeated in other Asian languages such as Thai and Vietnamese (Haudricourt, 1954). Tones evidently compensated for the loss of the distinctive feature of voiced stops. Old Chinese may have possessed clusters. “If the morphology in OC [Old Chinese] was wiped out, the reason seems to be that the one character–one syllable development, urged perhaps by the rise of tones, was not favorable to recording a morpheme containing more than one syllable or clusters.” (Dan Xu, 2006, 2).

Today researchers know that structural resemblances do not imply genetic relationship, and vice versa. Typologically speaking, Chinese has the word order SVO while “all TB [Tibetan-Burman] languages are OV, except for Bai and the Karen languages, which are VO (and more specifically SVO).” (Dryer, 2003, 43; see also Jingqi Fu and Lin Xu in this volume). Dryer has identified “a number of characteristics that are highly atypical of VO languages” in Mandarin. In fact, there seems to be a strong correlation for VO languages to have prepositions and OV languages to have postpositions. In Mandarin, however, both prepositions and postpositions are common (see Dan Xu, 2006, Danqing Liu in this volume).
With this schema in mind, readers will understand why in this book, the topic “Space in languages of China” comprises many approaches and perspectives.

2. Different Approaches to Space in Languages of China

The intent of this volume is for authors working on different domains to focus their investigation on one topic: the expression of space in various languages in China, both oral language and sign language, Mandarin and other Sinitic languages, as well as other languages of China.

In this book, many dialects are examined, including Wu and Yue dialects (Liu Danqing), Waxiang of an unidentified dialect spoken in Hunan (very little research on this dialect has been done, see Yunji Wu), and Jizhou of Hebei province, which is a Mandarin-speaking region (Lamarre). The Bai language, spoken in some regions of Yunnan province, is also investigated (Jingqi Fu and Lin Xu). The linguistic affiliation of Bai has been a topic of debate. Sign language is not ignored in this study (Shun-chiu Yau), whereas previous investigations of space mainly focused on oral language. Almost the entire history of China is covered, from Old Chinese to Middle Chinese, Modern Chinese, and contemporary Mandarin (Chappell and Peyraube, Fuxiang Wu, Chaofen Sun, Qingzhi Zhu and Wenjie Chen, Lamarre, Dan Xu, etc.).

If we can take the vast geographic area of China as a projection of time, we will see that the dialect varieties represent different depths in time. In other words, the different dialects form continuums corresponding to historic periods. The Wu and Xiang dialects still preserve the voiced stops, while in most other Chinese dialects these sounds have disappeared or become distinctive tones. The “entering tones,” which are in fact syllables ending in the stops -p, -t, -k, are well preserved in Yue, Min and Hakka, while in most regions they have been lost (except in some Jin dialects, which are isolated by mountains and seem more conservative for northern dialects). Current dialects present fine-grained patterns to diachronic analyses.

In this book, the following topics are discussed. They are also subjects of current investigations in general linguistics:

- grammaticalization
- typology of motion events (satellite-framed vs. verb-framed languages)
- adpositions (prepositions and postpositions)
- phonological change and its impact on syntax.

2.1. Grammaticalization

Almost all authors in this book have dealt directly or indirectly with the process of grammaticalization. It consists of a lexical item becoming a grammatical item, or a less grammatical element becoming a more grammatical one. The Chinese language offers rich examples of this process, and studies on this subject have flourished for two decades. The Chinese language has always been a serial verb construction language. Almost all prepositions originated from verbs. Some conjunctions also came from verbs. For example, the preposition zài grammaticalized from an existence verb (see Danqing Liu, Chaofen Sun in this volume). Evidently, the localizers (particles following an NP and indicating location in space) in Chinese
grammaticalized from a subclass of nouns, and changed from a specific and prototypical meaning of localizers to a general one through grammaticalization (see Chappell and Peyraube in this book). The locative term hòu ‘back’ in Chinese, however, came from a verb via grammaticalization (see Fuxiang Wu in this volume). In many other languages investigated by some linguists, the body part ‘back’ is mainly a source of locatives. It is clear that grammaticalization is a general phenomenon in human languages. The locatives have developed into object markers via a dative stage in Bai (See Jingqi Fu and Lin Xu). In sign languages as well, grammaticalization is reported (by Armstrong, 2002, cited by Yau in this volume). Some morphemes may currently be undergoing this process in standard Mandarin; for example jìn ‘enter’, according to Danqing Liu (see in this book), “is halfway in grammaticalization from a full verb to a spatial goal marker”. The verb zǒu can be also used as a directional ‘away’ (see Lamarre in this book). In standard Mandarin, the motion verbs ‘come’ and ‘go’ are found as main verbs, satellites (grammaticalized), and bound morphemes (see Dan Xu in this volume).

2.2. Typology of motion events

According to Talmy’s (2000) framework, the conceptualization of a motion event can be realized as set of different conceptual components in human languages. Thus two main types “Verb-framed languages” (V-languages) and “Satellite-framed languages” (S-languages) are found. In V-languages, path is expressed by the main verb, while in S-languages, path is indicated by a verb-sister position (verb affixes, verb particles). With his empiric investigation, Slobin (2004) proposes a third type, the “equipollently-framed language”. In this type, path and manner are expressed by equivalent grammatical forms. Wälchli (2001, cited by Berthele, 2004, 98) refines previous theories (Tesnière, 1959, Talmy, 2000) with three models of encoding the path, i.e. Verb encoding (by the verb stem), Adnominal encoding (by prepositions, postpositions or case marking) and Adverbal encoding (by verb affixes or verb particles). Generally speaking, Chinese and Japanese confirm the two typological differences established by Talmy: Chinese behaves as an S-language, and Japanese as a V-language. Lamarre notes that this categorization cannot account satisfactorily for the expression of deictic path. These typological features do however “exert an indirect influence on the strategies available to a language to combine deictic path, nondeictic path and the manner or cause of motion in a same verb complex” (Lamarre in this volume). Dan Xu (2006) proposes that the Chinese language has undergone a typological change from a V-language to an S-language. In contemporary standard Chinese, some motion verbs cannot match the S-language pattern because they behave as main verbs when an agent is the Figure (see Talmy, 2000) and must be considered as satellites when a patient is the Figure moved by an outside force (see Dan Xu in this volume).

2.3. Adpositions

As has been mentioned, prepositions in Chinese often originated as the grammaticalization of verbs. This point of view is widely adopted by the linguistic community. However, for some locative particles attached to an NP in Chinese, there
is disagreement. They can be viewed as “postpositions” (see Danqing Liu in this volume), localizers (see Chappell and Peyraube in this volume), “locative terms” (see Fuxiang Wu in this volume) or “NP enclitics” (see Chaofen Sun in this volume). Even the term “postposition” has only begun to be used in recent research of the Chinese language due to advanced typological investigations in general linguistics. Linguistic typology shows a clear-cut correlation between VO order with prepositions and OV order with postpositions. Standard Chinese is classified as a VO language, and the term “postposition” troubles some scholars. This paradox cannot be avoided if we are limited to the existing descriptions and approaches to Chinese. Personally, I think that the Chinese language should not be treated as homogeneous because of its long history and permanent contacts with other non-Han languages. The two orders VO and OV coexisted in Old Chinese (Dan Xu, 2006), and some OV vestiges are found in frozen expressions. Modern English is a VO language, though 15th century English was an OV language. In consequence, many examples of OV order remain in words such as ‘book-seller’, ‘easter-egg-hunt’ and so forth (see Givón, 1971). The same thing happens in Chinese. Though it is considered to be a VO language, in some expressions OV order is required (see Ren Zhou, 2006).

This means that an expected pure order is difficult to find in Chinese, which is undergoing steady often “invisible” evolution. If the status of these locative particles or postpositions is in disagreement, at least scholars agree that most of them arose from nominal elements. Actually, “postposition” implies a syntactic treatment, while “enclitic” implies a morphological interpretation. In other words, the former is freer while the latter is more bound. Perhaps these observations reflect scholars’ different perceptions of the degree of the grammaticalization of these locative particles. The debate remains open.

In sign languages, the “adpositions” are expressed by hand movements and facial expressions. The general tendency is that the Ground (see Talmy, 2000) precedes Figure; “locatives preceding the subject and predicates from SL [sign language] are abundant” (see Yau).

2.4. Phonological change and its impact on syntax

In presenting the languages in China in section 1, it has been suggested that Old Chinese phonology might have had clusters, voiced and unvoiced distinctions, which are completely unknown in standard contemporary Mandarin. Phonological change, often arising from phonetic modification in the first place, affects the morphology and even the syntax of a language. Scholars have long noted that the Chinese language in transmitted versions shows more and more dissyllabic words starting in the Han (206 BC–220 AD). Evidently this adjustment helped the language to avoid too many homophones. This innovation has multiple consequences in morphology as well as in syntax. Let us observe a few examples relative to spatial expressions. In Old Chinese, a single verb indicated both manner and path. However, starting in the Han, a growing number of verbs could only follow another verb, and expressed path. The satellite was no longer optional. These V-V compounds are often called verb-resultative compounds. Some of them became lexicalized dissyllabic words, while others remained at the syntactic level as a main verb plus a
satellite. The localizers evolved in the same way. Qingzhi Zhu and Wenjie Chen point out that in contemporary standard Chinese, the dissyllabic localizers come from monosyllabic ones. Their meaning has become more and more abstract and their function has specialized as locative markers. This morphosyntactic change corresponds to phonological needs since the Han. Chaofen Sun notices that the spatial terms that behave more like clitics form a phonological unit with an NP. Scholars have noted that these locative terms or postpositions play a more important role in indicating space than the preposition 在, since 在 can be omitted while postpositions cannot. Lamarre indicates that standard Chinese shows a strong tendency to use bipartite path verbs (nondeictic path + deictic path) in motion events. All these mentioned facts suggest that syntactic choices are often triggered by phonological changes and constraints.

3. Organization of the Book

In Section A “Space: a Cross-linguistic Perspective”, comparative investigations are made between several Chinese dialects, standard Mandarin, and other languages. Waxiang, a dialect almost unknown to linguists, and Bai, a language that is very controversial in linguistic discussions, have also been studied.

Chappell and Peyraube’s paper investigates localizers (方位词). Localizers express the relative spatial positions of objects. They can be monosyllabic or disyllabic. Usually monosyllabic localizers follow ordinary nouns, changing them into especially true for the two localizers 上 ‘on’ and 在 ‘in’, the versatility of the others being quite low in spoken language. Disyllabic localizers are formed by adding a suffix (usually 边, 面 or 头) or a prefix (以 or 之). Unlike monosyllabic localizers, they can be used alone as place words and can be subjects or objects, and can be combined with nouns to express position. The paper draws a general outline of the evolution of the localizer system through the different stages of the Chinese language and their use and meaning in different Sinitic languages.

As Danqing Liu points out, Modern Chinese marks a spatial role for head verbs syntactically. The word order “preposition + NP + postposition” is common. When a verb or NP has a spatial meaning, the preposition and/or postposition can be absent. The rule of omission varies between dialects: postpositions are more easily omitted in Mandarin and Cantonese than in Wu dialects, while pre-verbal prepositions are more easily omitted in Wu. Spatial prepositional phrases tend to occur pre-verbally in all modern Chinese dialects, but they more often occur post-verbally in Mandarin than in Wu dialects. In Cantonese, spatial NPs without prepositions are more inclined to follow the verb than in Mandarin or Wu dialects.

Lamarre’s paper examines two typologically opposite languages: Chinese, a satellite-framed language and Japanese, a verb-framed language (according to Talmy’s framework). She discusses the linguistic encoding of deictic motion in Chinese and Japanese, focusing on clauses where the verb complex expresses the manner or the cause of motion and/or non-deictic path, with deictic direction (toward or away from the speaker). She demonstrates that Japanese and Chinese, despite their different typological status, both rely heavily on deictic directionals, i.e. spatial deixis (vs.
person deixis). She points out that Chinese also frequently uses path verbs, behaving like a Verb-framed language.

In her study on locative expressions in the Waxiang dialect, spoken in Western Hunan, China, Yunji Wu shows that the locative words in Waxiang do not share much in common with either Mandarin or the Xiang dialect group, the main dialects spoken in Hunan. In the Waxiang dialect, ‘mountain’ and ‘river’ are used as references for directions or locations. There are more distinctions among objects than in Mandarin and the Xiang dialects. There is a three-way, sometimes described as even a four-way system of demonstrative pronouns. There are three words for ‘up’. There is a distinction for the word ‘side’: pʰie⁵⁵ta refers to a place close to the object or person referred to, while pʰie⁵⁵la refers to a place closer to the speaker.

Jingqi Fu and Lin Xu studied the diachronic pathways of object markers from locative markers in Bai, a Sino-Tibetan language spoken in Yunnan, China. Bai has a pair of postpositions that are used as both locative and object markers with contrastive meanings. The authors have shown the path of grammaticalization of the locative into object markers via a dative stage. The critical contrast of ‘on X’ vs. ‘around X’ has evolved into ‘central participant’ vs. ‘peripheral participant’. Crucial to this development is the notion of contact vs. absence of it. This contrast within the locative permits a split into direct vs. indirect roles, unlike in other languages where the Dative-Locative affinity is reflected with a single morpheme. Developments of the two postpositions in different dialects of Bai are also discussed.

Shun-chiu Yau analyzes space with another approach. He reveals how Sign Language (SL) has taken advantage of its visual-spatial particularity to develop independently and rapidly within a very short period. The chapter also argues that there is a strong link between SL and gestures. Gestures are common to all humans, and not exclusively practiced by deaf signers. At the theoretical level, insistence on this gestural link is of utmost importance for those who are convinced that gestures once played a crucial role in the emergence of human language. Thus, SL observations and analyses are of theoretical interest not only to sign researchers, but also to those working on general linguistics.

In Section B. Space in Synchronic and Diachronic Chinese, four works have investigated space in Chinese from synchronic and diachronic approaches.

Dan Xu shows that contemporary Chinese is likely a satellite-framed language, while Old Chinese was a verb-framed language. Motion verbs do not fit very well into this dichotomy because some of them have kept their verbal features in the serial verb construction, in which other verbs [-motion] are grammaticalized as satellites. Asymmetry is one of the characteristics of human language. The Chinese language also presents numerous asymmetrical cases. The asymmetry in language reflects the speaker’s asymmetric perception of space. The motion verbs lái ‘come’ and qù ‘go’, the spatial terms qián ‘before, front’ and hòu ‘back’, shàng ‘above’ and xià ‘down’ are asymmetrical at both the syntactic and semantic levels. These issues are treated from a cognitive point of view.

Chaofen Sun has proposed three types of Chinese locative: definite, specific and general. The grammaticalization of the Chinese locative construction is a renewal process involving two conditions: a selectional restriction and a multi-syllabic
constraint that jointly define the prototypical Chinese locative. The author claims that there are neither postpositions nor circumpositions in Chinese as in Amharic. Furthermore, none of the kind of word-order changes hypothesized by Greenberg (1995) for Amharic ever happened in Chinese history. Following Himmelmann’s (2004) characterization, in which three types of expansion (host-class, syntactic, and semantic-pragmatic) are considered essential to grammaticalization, special attention is given to the expansion of the two conditions in these three domains over time.

Fuxiang Wu’s paper focuses on the source model and semantic change of the locative term ㄏou ‘back’ in Chinese. In specific, the semantic and morphosyntactic changes taking place when ㄏou occupied the head position in genitive structures are studied. According to Svorou (1986, 1993) and Heine (Heine1997, Heine et al. 1991), in cross-linguistic studies, there are three source models for spatial terms: body part terms, environmental landmarks, and relational part terms. The locative term ㄏou in Chinese originated from a motional process. Although this does not correspond to the mainstream source models of BACK-REGION grams, it represents a typological feature in human languages rather than a language-specific characteristic. Metonymy is the mechanism in the meaning change of ㄏou.

Qingzhi Zhu and Wenjie Chen point out in their paper that location is an important category of space. In Chinese, from the time of the oracle bone inscriptions to the present, one means used to express space or location is demonstrative pronouns. Important changes occurred over the history of Chinese demonstrative pronouns. Before Middle Chinese, there was no co-occurrence of inessive pronouns and demonstratives to indicate location. In Late Middle Chinese, a system of inessive pronouns had developed such as zhèlǐ, zhèbiān, zhèr ‘here’, nàlǐ, nàbiān, nàr ‘there’. These words became specialized into locative demonstrative pronouns. The paper focuses on their development, and tries to answer the question of how this evolution occurred and analyze the reasons for this change.

The authors of this volume present different points of view on the expression of space in language and related theoretical issues. Space is a topic that is both classical and modern, of enduring interest. We hope that with our studies of space in languages of China, more general linguists become interested in the Chinese language and better understand how Chinese structures space. Chinese presents similarities with other languages in expressing space, as well as displaying some less common behaviors which merit further investigation. These studies of space give insight into not only general linguistics but also other domains such as anthropology and psychology.

Notes

1 See Dryer, 1992.
2 People often refer to Mandarin of the north. In fact, Mandarin has some subgroups spread in the north, but also in south provinces such as Sichuan, Yunnan, etc. In these provinces, many non Han (non Chinese) languages are spoken, for instance languages belonging to the Tibeto-Burman family in west and southwest, Miao-Yao and Tai in the south.
The statistics are provided by the above document dated from 1987. Those seen in Wikipedia are higher for some dialects: 836 million for Mandarin, 71 million for Wu, 71 million for Yue, 60 million for Min, etc.

Here I have taken the periodization proposed by Dan Xu (2006), which is simplified and takes account of typological change in Chinese Syntax. Please see also the chronological dynasties of Chinese history provided in the appendix at the end of the Introduction.


See Jie Zhao, 1989.

See also Feng Shengli, 2000.

This section is based on abstracts provided by the authors of this volume.
References


## Appendix 1

**Chinese Chronology**

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<td>770–256 BC</td>
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<td>770–476 BC</td>
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Appendix 2

Sinitic Languages

Map taken from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
CHINESE LOCALIZERS: DIACHRONY AND SOME TYPOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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Abstract: Localizers (fāngwèicí 方位词) express the relative position of objects. Either monosyllabic or dissyllabic in form, they belong to a closed sub-class. The monosyllabic set comprises the following localizers: shàng 上 ‘up’, xià 下 ‘down’, qián 前 ‘front’, hòu 后 ‘back’, lǐ 里 ‘inside’, wài 外 ‘outside’, zuò 左 ‘left’, yòu 右 ‘right’, dōng 东 ‘east’, xī 西 ‘west’, nán 南 ‘south’, běi 北 ‘north’, zhōng 中 ‘middle’, jiān 间 ‘in, middle’, páng 旁 ‘side’, nèi 内 ‘inside, within’. In the majority of cases, monosyllabic localizers follow ordinary nouns, changing them into place words (chùsuǒ 处所词) as in: zhuōzì shàng (table-on) ‘on the table’. This is especially the case for the two localizers shàng ‘on’ and lǐ ‘in’, the versatility of the others being quite reduced as far as the spoken language is concerned. Disyllabic localizers are formed by adding a suffix (typically biānr 边儿, miànr 面儿 or tóu 头) or a prefix (yǐ 以 or zhǐ 之). Distinct from the monosyllables, they can be used alone as place words, serve as subjects or objects, or be combined with nouns to express position. Our analysis will provide the general outlines for the evolution of the system of localizers through different stages of the Chinese language (Archaic period, Medieval period, etc.), including their use and meaning in different Sinitic languages. It is shown that the evolution followed the direction of semantic change: dìngxiàngxing 定向性 > fànxiàngxing 泛向性, i.e. from a specific and prototype meaning for each localizer to a general one through reinterpretation. We propose that the Prototype model, rather than the Basic Meaning model, can be applied to explain this process of semantic change. Similar processes of syntactic and semantic change which can be observed in modern Sinitic languages (or Chinese dialects) are also briefly commented upon.

1. Introduction

There exists in Chinese a special category of words expressing the relative position of objects. They form a closed class (or subclass) and can be monosyllabic or disyllabic. They are called ‘localizers’ (fāngwèicí 方位词). They contribute to creating a system of spatial representation in Chinese which is markedly different from those found in the Indo-European languages. Nonetheless, neither their nature, their function nor their meaning have remained constant during the history of the Chinese language. The systems of localizers also differ in Sinitic languages other than Mandarin. In this article, we set out to examine the evolution of these words through different stages of the Chinese language (Archaic Chinese, Medieval Chinese and the modern period) and in a tentative and far less detailed way, deal with certain of their uses and meanings in several Sinitic languages, distinct from Mandarin.

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2. Place Words and Localizers

In order to understand the usage of Mandarin Chinese localizers, it is necessary to grasp the concept in Chinese of *chùsuǒ 词 ‘place words’.* A special category of words exists in Chinese called ‘place words’ (*chùsuǒ词*) by Y. R. Chao (1968: 519 ff.), that can be defined as follows: place words are substantives which can be objects of verbs or prepositions of place or movement, including the verbs *lái 来 ‘come to’, dào 到 ‘arrive at’, or the prepositions *zài 在 ‘at’, dào 到 ‘to’, cóng 从 ‘from’, wǎng 往 ‘toward’, etc.; (see Chao, 1968: 520 ff., Peyraube, 1980, 10 ff.). Substantives which are not place words usually cannot occupy such positions. Thus, you cannot say in Chinese *dào mén qù 到门去 ‘go to the door’,* but one can say *dào Zhōngguó qù 到中国去 ‘go to China’ or *dào xuéxiào qù 到学校去 ‘go to the school’. While the terms ‘China’ or ‘school’ are place words, ‘door’ is not. More precisely, place words can be:

(i) place names or geographical locations, such as Zhōngguó 中国 ‘China’, Bālì 巴黎 ‘Paris’;
(ii) nouns with an inherently locative value, i.e. nouns for places used as place names, such as *xuéxiào 学校 ‘school’, fànguǎn 饭馆儿 ‘restaurant*, tūshūguǎn 图书馆 ‘library’;
(iii) disyllabic localizers expressing spatial deixis such as lǐtou 里头 ‘inside’, dōngbiān 东边儿 ‘the east side’, pángbiān 旁边儿 ‘side, beside’; see below the whole list of disyllabic localizers;
(iv) common nouns followed by monosyllabic or disyllabic localizers, such as *zhuōzi shàng 桌子上 ‘on the table’, fángzi bèihòu 房子背后 ‘at the back of the house’;
(v) demonstrative locative pronouns such as zhè 这儿 ‘here’, nàr 那儿 ‘there’ and nàr 哪儿 ‘where’.

If, most of the time, place words are related to verbs or prepositions of place or movement, they are not restricted to such verbs or prepositions. They can be objects of other verbs as well. For example, *wǒ kàn bú jiàn mén bèihòu 我看不见门背后 [I cannot-see door behind] ‘I can’t see behind the door’.*

Localizers (*fāngwèicí 方位词*), that express the relative position of things, may have different functions according to whether they are monosyllabic or disyllabic. They form a closed class (or subclass). The monosyllabic localizers comprise: *shàng* 上 ‘up’, *xià* 下 ‘down’, *qián* 前 ‘front’, *hòu* 后 ‘back’, *lǐ* 里 ‘inside’, *wài* 外 ‘outside’, *zuǒ* 左 ‘left’, *yòu* 右 ‘right’, *dōng* 东 ‘east’, *xi 西 ‘west’, *nán 南 ‘south’, *běi* 北 ‘north’, *zhōng* 中 ‘middle’, *jiān* 间 ‘in, middle’, *páng* 旁 ‘side’, *nèi* 内 ‘inside, within’. Disyllabic localizers are usually formed by adding a suffix (typically *biān* 边儿, *miàn* 面儿 or *tóu* 头) or a prefix (*yī* 以 or *zhī* 之) to the monosyllables.
Most of the time, the monosyllabic localizers follow ordinary nouns, changing them into place words (as in (iv) above). This is especially the case for the two localizers *shàng* and *lǐ*, the degree of versatility of the others being quite low in the spoken languages. They cannot be used alone, except in certain fixed phrases based largely on Classical Chinese (as in *Shàng yǒu tiāntáng, xià yǒu Sū Háng* 上有天堂下有苏杭 ‘above there is Heaven, below there are Suzhou and Hangzhou’), or as objects of the prepositions *wǎng* 往, *xiàng* 向 or *cháo* 朝 ‘to, toward’, as in *wǎng lǐ zǒu* 往里走 ‘to inside move’ ‘move forward’; see Wen Lian (1959: 8), Y. R. Chao (1968: 525), Peyraube (1980: 31).

Which categories do these place words and localizers belong to? As far as the localizers are concerned, nearly every viewpoint has been put forward. They have been considered to be adjectives (Ma Jianzhong, [1898], *Mǎ shì wén tōng*, chapter 3), adverbs (Lü Shuxiang, 1947, Li Jingxi and Liu Shiru, 1955), nominal suffixes (Cartier, 1972), postpositions forming a discontinuous constituent with the prepositions they frequently co-occur with (Hagège, 1975: 220 ff., Peyraube, 1980: 53 ff.), spatial enclitics or particles (Sun Chaofen, forthcoming), and even pronouns (Rygaloff, 1973: 143). Usually, however, they are considered as a subclass of nouns, for the good reason that it does not seem desirable to distinguish the monosyllabic localizers from the disyllabic localizers. Thus the latter, like the monosyllabic localizers, express position when they are combined with nouns, but they also can be used alone as place words, functioning as either subjects or objects.

Despite this, not everyone agrees with the judgement of place words as belonging to the category of nouns. It could be a case of an autonomous category of words, which, unlike common nouns, do not have the possibility of being modified by classifier phrases of the form *Numeral + Classifier*, but which may, by contrast, be objects of the prepositions *zài* 在 ‘at’ or *dào* 到 ‘to’ or have an adverbial function, precisely what common nouns are able to do. This is the view of Li Chongxing (1992) and Chu Zexiang (1997, 2006) who claim that Zhu Dexi (1982: 42–45) already tended to the view that place words, and also time words and localizers were separate and autonomous categories.

We take the following view in this article, on the model of Chu Zexiang (2006) that localizers – in the same way as place words – form a subclass of nominals, that nonetheless can be considered autonomous. However, this is not the main focus of our proposal which is to outline the historical evolution of the localizers.

3. From Archaic Chinese (11th c. BC) to Medieval Chinese (3rd c. AD)

3.1. Archaic Chinese

In Archaic Chinese (11th – 2nd centuries BC.), localizers are only monosyllabic and much less frequent than they are in contemporary Chinese. The main reason why they are less used is because they are not needed to follow ordinary nouns in order to transform them into place words. In other words, there are no fundamental differences between ordinary nouns and place words in the classical language. Another characteristic of the period is that the locative prepositions (for the large
part yú 于/於 ‘at, to, from, etc.’) are needed to introduce place words when these place words are not direct objects of locative or movement verbs.

Localizers do already exist in Chinese since the Pre-Archaic period (14th – 11th c. BC.), i.e. in the language of the oracle bone inscriptions. Zhao Cheng (1988: 269–272) makes an inventory of seven of them: dōng 東 ‘east’, nán 南 ‘south’, xī 西 ‘west’, běi 北 ‘north’, zhōng 中 ‘middle’, zuǒ 左 ‘left’ and yòu 右 ‘right’. Shàng 上 and xià 下 are also attested in the language of the oracle bone inscriptions, but their meaning is probably respectively ‘Heaven’ and ‘Earth’, and not ‘above, on’ and ‘below, under’.

These seven localizers are still used during the Archaic period, together with some others, namely shàng and xià, meaning by this stage ‘above, on’ and ‘below, under’, nèi 内 ‘inside’, wài 外 ‘outside’, and, to a lesser extent, qián 前 ‘front’ and hòu 后 ‘back’, which appeared later, though not as late as ǐ 裏, which Chu Zexiang (1996) dates back to the 4th or 5th c. AD. See also Yang Bojun and He Leshi (1992: 89–92).

Apart from very rare and marginal exceptions (for instance two examples of wàimian 外面 ‘outside’ in the Mozi [but this text dated as 3rd c. B.C. displays several original phenomena not attested in other texts of the same period; see Peyraube 1988: 101, Zhang Wanqi 1998]), these localizers are always monosyllabic and, contrary to contemporary Chinese, they can be used alone to express place (chìsuǒ 處所). Thus, they are place words and they can be subjects, objects or even adverbials. They are used both as (i) place words like the disyllabic localizers in contemporary Chinese (see ex. 1–4), and as (ii) position words (or spatial deictics) following nouns (see examples above, 5–9). Examples:

1. 瞰之在前, 忽焉在後 (論語: 子罕)
   zhān zhī zài qián hū yān zài hòu
   look them be-at front suddenly then be-at behind
   ‘Looking at them, they are in front of me, but they then suddenly appear behind.’

2. 周公居東二年 (書經: 金滕)
   Zhōu gōng jū dōng èr nián
   Zhou prince live east two year
   ‘Prince Zhou has been living in the east for the last two years.’

3. 今拜乎上 (論語: 子罕)
   jīn bài hū shàng
   now worship at above
   ‘Now, the practice is to worship above (the hall).’

4. 晉侯在外十九年矣 (左傳: 僖公二十八年)
   Jìn hóu zài wài shí jiǔ nián yǐ
   Jin prince be-at outside ten nine year part.
   ‘The Prince of Jin has been away for nineteen years.’
(5) 王坐於堂上 (孟子: 梁惠王上)
wáng zuò yú táng shàng  
king sit at hall aloft  
‘The king was sitting aloft in the hall.’

(6) 王立於沼上 (孟子: 梁惠王上)
wáng lì yú zhǎo shàng  
king stand at pond on  
‘The king was standing by a pond.’

(7) 則是方四十里為阱於國中 (孟子: 梁惠王下)
zé shì fāng sì shí lǐ wéi jǐng yú guó zhōng  
thus this square four ten lǐ be pitfall at kingdom middle  
‘Thus those forty square lǐ are a pitfall in the middle of the kingdom.’

(8) 孟孫立於房外 (左傳: 定公六年)
Mèng Sūn lì yú fáng wài  
Meng Sun stand at room outside  
‘Meng Sun was standing outside the room.’

(9) 射其左, 越於車下, 射其右, 斃於車中 (左傳: 成公二年)
shè qī zuǒ yuè yú chē xià shè qī yòu bì yú chē zhōng  
shoot (an arrow) his left pass at chariot under shoot his right die at chariot inside  
‘(He) shot (the one who was on) his left who fell down under the chariot, he shot (the one who was) on his right who died inside the chariot.’

If common nouns in Classical Chinese do not necessarily need to be followed by a localizer to be place words, as is the case for contemporary Chinese, there are nevertheless two conditions for this to be possible: (i) they must be objects of verbs of place or movement (ex. 10), and/or (ii) they must be introduced by a locative preposition, yú 于/於, or less often hū 乎, zhū 諸 or even zhī 之 (zhī can be considered sometimes as an equivalent of zhū, according to Li Chongxing 1992), as shown in the following examples (11–13). There are some exceptions, especially when the nouns used as place words are subjects (as in example 14) or in some other cases when the nouns are taken to have a locative value and are used as place names, as in (15):

(10) 不之堯之子而之舜 (孟子: 萬章上)
bù zhī Yáo zhī zǐ ér zhī Shùn  
negation go Yao det.-part. on but go Shun  
‘(The princes) went not to the son of Yao, but to Shun.’
(11) 子張書諸紳 (論語：衛靈公)
Zǐ Zhāng shū zhū shēn
Zi Zhang write it+at sash
‘Zi Zhang wrote them (these words) on his sash.’

[zhū 諸 = zhī 之 + yú 於]

(12) 婦人笑於房 (左傳：宣公十七年)
fù rén xiào yú fāng
princess laugh at room
‘The princess laughed in (her) room.’

(13) 公薨於車 (左傳：桓公十八年)
gōng hōng yú chē
prince die at chariot
‘The prince died in the chariot.’

(14) 塗有餓莩而不知發 (孟子：梁惠王上)
tú yǒu è piáo ér bù zhī fā
road there-be hungry body and negation know start
‘There are people dying from famine on the road and (you) don’t know how to start (issuing the stores of your granaries).’

(15) 樹吾墓檟 (左傳：哀公十一年)
shù wú mù jiǎ
plant my tomb catalpa
‘Plant catalpas on my tomb.’

Even when place words are formed by Nouns + Localizers, it is still rare to have the preposition yú deleted. An exception is:

(16) 韓厥執縶馬前 (左傳：成公二年)
Hán Jué zhí zhí mǎ qián
Han Jue take strap horse in-front-of
‘Han Jue took a strap in front of the horses.’

Only when the verb has the third person or demonstrative pronoun zhī as its object, the preposition yú does not seem to be needed, as in:

(17) 子產使校人蓄之池 (孟子：萬章上)
Zīchān shǐ xiào rén xù zhī chí
Zichan order field-officer man keep it pond
‘Zichan ordered his field-officer to keep it (the fish) on the pound.’
However, as hypothesized by Li Chongxing (1992), one can assume, in these cases, that a locative preposition yú has been deleted before the noun chí ‘pond’ (in ex. 17), or even that zhī might involve the fusion: zhū = zhī ‘it’ + yú ‘to’.

3.2. Pre-Medieval Chinese

In Pre-Medieval Chinese, which roughly corresponds to the Han period (206 BC. – 220 AD), the characteristics of place words and localizers have changed. These changes can be summarized as follows:

(i) common nouns are no longer used as place words, or, at least, it is not as easy as it was in Late Archaic. Examples of place words in the Shǐ jì 史記 (1st century B.C.) which are formed by ‘Common nouns + Localizers’ and which probably could not have been used as place words without a localizer are given in examples (18–20).

(ii) the locative preposition yú is no longer needed to introduce a place word which is not the object of a verb of place or movement. Examples (18–20) also reveal this trend, as well as those in (22–23).

(iii) localizers become functional words, though they still express a clear and precise position of things. Moreover, localizers which are disyllabic in composition, start to be used at the end of this period. Examples:

(18) 桓公與夫人蔡姬戲船中（史記：齊太公世家）

Huang prince and spouse Cai Ji have-fun boat in
‘The prince Huang and his spouse Cai Ji had fun in a boat.’

(19) 孔子去曹適宋，與弟子習禮大樹下（史記：孔子世家）

Kongzi leave Cao go Song with disciple practice rite big tree under
‘Kongzi left Cao and went to Song to practice the rites with his disciples under a big tree.’

(20) 出朝，則抱以適趙盾所（史記：晉世家）

leave court then carry-in-the-arms with go Zhao Dun place
‘(She) left the court and then, carrying (her child) in her arms, went with (him) to Zhao Dun’s place.’

In this last example, there is no localizer after the personal noun Zhao Dun, but a noun expressing a place (suǒ ‘residence’), which shows that personal names can no longer be used as place words, as they could be earlier in Classical Chinese (see ex. 10). It is obvious if one compares this example taken from the Shǐ jì with the similar one extracted from the Zuo zhuan (5th c. B.C.), where the personal name Zhao (Dun) is used as a place word:
(21) 出朝，則抱以適趙氏（左傳：文公七年）
chū cháo zé bào yì shì Zhào shì
leave court then carry-in-the-arms with go Zhao family
‘(She) left the court and then, carrying (her child) in her arms, went with (him) to Zhao’s place.’

(22) 西與秦將楊熊戰白馬（史記：高祖本記）
Xi yú Qín jiàng Yáng Xióng zhàn Bái Mǎ
Xi and Qin general Yang Xiong fight Bai Ma
‘Xi and the general of Qin, Yang Xiong, fought at Bai Ma.’

[In this example, the place word is a place name]

(23) 殺義帝江南（史記：高祖本記）
shā Yì Dì jiāng nán
kill Yi Di river south
‘(He) killed Yi Di south of the river.’

[The place word is a noun followed by a localizer]

There are still cases, of course, where both the locative preposition yú and a localizer following the noun are present, as in:

(24) 種瓜於長安城東（史記：蕭相國世家）
zhòng guā yú Cháng’ān chéng dōng
plant melon at Chang’an city east
‘(He) planted melons on the eastern side of the Chang’an city.’

However, according to Li Chongxing (1992), in chapter 8 of the Shi ji (Gāo zǔ běn jì), there are 80 place words which are not introduced by the locative preposition yú, while only 14 are. If one compares this situation to the one prevailing in Late Archaic Chinese, there is no doubt that there has been a change. Such a change, as mentioned before, is mainly due to the fact that ordinary nouns and place words are now differentiated. As the place word is now formed by a noun with its postposed localizer, the locative preposition is not necessary.

But the most important characteristic of the localizers in this period (Pre-Medieval) is undoubtedly the third one (see (iii) above), i.e. localizers tend to behave like real functional words. They start to play an important grammatical role, as one of their main functions is to follow nouns and transform them into place words. They still express of course a real and precise position, having what Lü Shuxiang (1984: 294) called dìngxiàngxing 定向性 (‘precise position character’): ‘on’, ‘under’, ‘in’, ‘outside’, ‘in front of’, ‘behind’, ‘left’, etc. But in the case of some of them (as for zhōng or jiān ‘in’), the meaning of a precise position is somewhat blurred. Examples showing these tendencies follow: