

RESPONSE TO PAN

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Junlin Pan has analyzed a feature of Chinese grammar which is of interest to both theoretical and applied linguists. For theory, it raises questions about the canonical word order which has been used to establish typological universals, and about the nature of Chinese phrase structure in relation to the dichotomous directionality of X-Bar Theory. For application, it focuses on an aspect of Chinese which is exceptionally difficult for second language learners to master and easy for first language speakers to lose, and it raises questions of why this should be so.

The paper first presents a useful summary of several different views on whether there are prepositions and/or postpositions in Chinese, and weighs the pros and cons of arguments for the different analyses. Pan develops a good basis for supporting the claim that the prenominal locative (which perhaps might be called 'orienting') markers differ in essential ways from homophonous verbs in modern Chinese grammar, and that monosyllabic postnominal locative (perhaps 'localizing') markers differ from bisyllabic locational nouns which may occur in the same position. These prenominal and postnominal locative markers do seem to function respectively as prepositions and postpositions.

What is interesting, of course, is that Chinese has both, while most other languages of the world are categorized as having one or the other. Pan introduces the possibility of a prepositional phrase structure (head initial) which includes a postpositional phrase (head final). This is not inconsistent with analyses of Chinese which claim that the language has mixed head directionality, but further attention should be given to the theoretical implications of the phrase structure of locatives which is being proposed here, both in relation to X-Bar Theory and to potential parameter setting processes in first (and perhaps second) language acquisition.

The term 'circumposition' may be inappropriate for characterizing the structure which Pan is proposing, since it implies the existence of a single unit at some underlying level which is discontinuous on the surface (such as the *doo ... da* negative in Navajo, where whatever is being negated is inserted between the two parts). If the postposition is an immediate constituent of the noun, and the preposition is an immediate constituent of the resulting postpositional phrase, there is a hierarchical relationship between elements which is not typical of a 'circumposition'. The variable combination of prepositions and postpositions in Chinese which Pan documents also indicates that they are not a single discontinuous unit.

Research data indicates that the preposition apparently is acquired earlier than the postposition in Chinese as both a first and as a second language. If this is indeed so, it might support the analysis that the phrase is head initial at the level of P-Bar. Does the ambiguity in head directionality within the locative phrase as a whole contribute to the difficulty learners have with the structure? That is possible, but other complexities of postposition use would have to be controlled experimentally if this hypothesis is to be explored: e.g., whether the locative phrase occurs before or after the verb, the category of the noun (including how well known the place is), and even the prosodic structure of the phrase. The occurrence of the preposition is much more predictable, which might in itself account for relative 'learnability' if other factors were not controlled.

I have many more questions than answers for Pan in reaction to her paper, but in asking them, I mean to be strongly encouraging of this line of exploration. I think her paper presents a good example of the essential interaction of theoretical and applied linguistics, and of ways in which each perspective can potentially inform the other.