Revisiting Chinese P: is it a necessary category?

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Outline

Introduction

Question

Is P a necessary category in Chinese?

Answer

No. There isn't sufficient PLD contrast to cue a separate category P.

Outline

Framework

A neo-emergentist approach to features and categories.

The (full) inventory of substantive FFs is not UG-given but emergent.

- UG provides FF template
- PLD skews FF postulation based on language-specific salience
- 3rd factors govern the process

Crucially

- FFs regulate systematic contrasts that cannot be explained by solely semantic or phonological considerations.
- Since contrasts vary across languages, FF inventory and category contents also vary.

(Biberauer 2016)

Framework

Two 3rd factors relevant here:

- **Feature Economy (FE)**: postulate as few formal features as possible to account for the input.
- **Maximize Minimal Means (MMM)**: a minimax search algorithm which minimizes feature postulation but makes maximal use of available features. (Biberauer 2016: 8, Roberts *to appear*: 95)

3rd factors are domain-general learning biases leading towards optimal use of cognitive resources.

Outline

Reported P items in Chinese

The following lexical items are often classified as P:

- Postpositions: *shàng* "on", *xià* "under", *lǐ* "in", *wài* "out", etc.
- Prepositions: *cóng* "from", *xiàng* "to", *zài* "at", *bǎ* "DISPOSAL", etc.

There are many more items, but their syntactic distributions generally fall in the above two classes.

I will argue: although these are translated into English as P elements, their categorial status in Chinese is not P.

Huang, Li & Li's (2009) arguments

Chinese "PostPs" are in fact NPs because:

1. They are head-final like NPs.

(1) a. chéng **wài**   (Mandarin)
     city   outside
     "the outside of the city" ($\neq$outside the city)

   b. qiáo **xià**
      bridge underneath
      "the underneath of the bridge" ($\neq$under the bridge)

   c. shān **lǐ**
      mountain inside
      "the inside of the mountain" ($\neq$in the mountain)

(2) chéng-**mén** "city-gate", qiáo-**dūn** "bridge-pier", shān-**jiǎo** "mountain-foot"

Huang, Li & Li's (2009) arguments

2 They can be used as subjects/objects like NPs.

(3) a. **Chéng-wài** hěn bú-cuò.
city-outside very not-bad
"The city's outside is very nice."

b. Dí-jūn hōng-zhà **qiáo-xià**.
enemy-army explode-explode bridge-under
"The enemies exploded the underneath of the bridge."

(4) a. **Chéng-mén** hěn dà.
city-gate very bit
"The city gate is very big."

b. Dí-jūn hōng-zhà **qiáo-dūn**.
enemy-army explode-explode bridge-pier
"The enemies exploded the piers of the bridge."

3. They usually can't denote location alone (like NP).

(5) a. Tā *(zài) **chéng-wài** zhù.
   he   be at   city-outside live
   "He lives outside the city."

   b. xiǎo-yā   *(zài) **qiáo-xià**   yóu-shuǐ.
      small-duck   be at   bridge-under swim-water
      "The small duck swims under the bridge."

(6) a. Tāmen *(zài) **chéng-mén** xiāng-huì.
      they   be at   city-gate   each other-meet
      "They meet each other at the city gate."

   b. Dírén *(zài) **qiáo-dūn** mái léi.
      enemy   be at   bridge-pier bury mine
      "The enemies bury mines at the piers of the bridge."

HL&L: the postnominal elements semantically resembling postpositions are nouns in Chinese.

➜Since the "postpositions" morphosyntactically behave like nouns, there is no PLD cue to formalize a separate category.

Djamouri, Paul & Whitman's (2013) counterarguments

- The "postpositions" require complements (like P).
- They are incompatible with the relational linker *de* (unlike N).

(7) a. Shū zài   *(zhuōzi) **shàng**.   ("postposition")
    book be at table   on
    "The book is on *(the table)."

  b. zhuōzi (* de) **shàng**
     table   REL on
     "on the table/*the table's on"

(8) a. Shū zài   **shàng-miàn**.   (noun)
    book be at upper-face
    "The book is on the top."

  b. zhuōzi de **shàng-miàn**
     table   REL upper-face
     "the table's top"

Contra DP&W (2013)

1. The complement requirement is a prosodic effect.
   - Modern Chinese favors constituents with even number syllables.

(9) a. ?? Shū zài **shàng**.
    book be at top
    "The book is on the table."

   b. Shèng-shū zài **shàng**.
      holy-book be at top
      "The holy book is on the top."

(10) a. Huáng-tiān zài **shàng**, hòu-tǔ zài **xià**.
     yellow-sky be at top   thick-earth be at bottom
     "The sky is on the top; the earth is at the bottom."

   b. Jiārén zài **lǐ**, qīnqī zài **wài**.
      family be at inside relatives be at outside
      "Family members are inside; relatives are outside."

Contra DP&W (2013)

2 The unacceptability of *de* is a register effect.
  - Monosyllabic location nouns (high-register) vs. *de* (low-register).
  - Register has grammatical significance in Chinese (Feng 2012).

(11) a. zhuōzi *de **shàng**
      table   REL top
      "the top of the table"

   b. zhuōzi zhī **shàng**
      table   REL top
      "the top of the table"

(12) a. dà-qiáo   *de **xià**
      big-bridge REL underneath
      "the underneath of the bridge"

   b. dà-qiáo   zhī **xià**
      big-bridge REL underneath
      "the underneath of the bridge"

(13) a. jiàoshì   *de **wài**
      classroom REL outside
      "the outside of the classroom"

   b. jiàoshì   zhī **wài**
      classroom REL outside
      "the outside of the classroom"

Contra DP&W (2013)

Vice versa, disyllabic location nouns (low-register) are incompaticle with *zhī*.

(14) a. zhuōzi de **shàng-miàn**
          table   REL upper-face
          "the top of the table"

      b. zhuōzi *zhī **shàng-miàn**
          table   REL upper-face
          "the top of the table"

(15) a. dà-qiáo   de **xià-fāng**
          big-bridge REL lower-direction
          "the underneath of the bridge"

      b. dà-qiáo   *zhī **xià-fāng**
          big-bridge REL lower-direction
          "the underneath of the bridge"

(16) a. jiàoshì   de **wài-biān**
          classroom REL outer-side
          "the outside of the classroom"

      b. jiàoshì   *zhī **wài-biān**
          classroom REL outer-side
          "the outside of the classroom"

Summary 2

DP&W's (2013) counterarguments are not valid. I stay with HL&L's (2009) conclusion that Chinese "postpositions" are nouns.

➔They express locational meanings, but this does not entail formalized [Loc] or [P] feature.

"Prepositions" in Chinese

The basic distribution of "prepositions" is shown below.

- The "PrepP" always precedes the main verb.

(17) a. Tā **cóng** nán-fāng lái.
   he from south-direction come
   "He comes from the south."

   b. Wǒ **bǎ** tāng hē le.
   I DISP soup drink SFP
   "I ate the soup."

   c. Fànrén **xiàng** chá-lǐ xià le dú.
   criminal to tea-inside put down PFV poison
   "The criminal put down poison into the tea."

"Prepositions" in Chinese

The "prepositions" all have verbal origin in history.

(18) a. **cóng**, suí-xíng yě. (2c. BC)
cong follow-go SFP
"*Cóng* means 'to folow'."

    b. **Bǎ** jiǔ lín fēng. (11c. AD)
hold alcohol face wind
"(I) hold the alcohol and face the wind."

    c. Jiàn jiàn **xiàng** jǐ. (3c. AD)
see sword face self
"He saw the sword was facing him."

And they still have verbal uses today.

(19) a. Tā **cóng** guò jūn.
he follow EXP army
"He once joined the army."

b. Tā jìnlái **bǎ** le xǔduō mēi.
he recently flirt PFV many girls
"Recently he flirted with many girls."

c. Kuíhuā **xiàng** zhe tàiyáng.
sunflower face PROG sun
"The sunflower is facing the sun."

"Prepositions" are verbal

I argue these "prepositions" are [V] rather than [P], because

- they have verbal uses both diachronically and synchronically,
- they always precede the main verb, which is unexpected if they head PPs (Chinese VP is head-initial).

➔The contrast is [V]-internal rather than between [V] and another lexical category.

"Prepositions" are verbal

I argue these "prepositions" are [V] rather than [P], because

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- they always precede the main verb, which is unexpected if they head PPs (Chinese VP is head-initial).

➜The contrast is [V]-internal rather than between [V] and another lexical category.

Considering they are originally purely verbal, their diachronic semantic bleaching (grammaticalization) should go up the verbal extended projection (cf. Roberts & Roussou 2003).

➜After grammaticalization, they become light verbs rather than prepositions.

Outline

Conclusion

In Chinese

- the "postpositions" are location nouns,
- the "prepositions" are light verbs.

Since they well fit into the binary (N-V) categorial contrast, there is no need to postulate a third lexical category P.

Interaction of three factors: a category-poor UG, a Chinese-specific PLD, the 3rd factors FE and MMM.

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