Adpositions: Pragmatic, semantic and syntactic perspectives

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This book is a sequel to Feigenbaum & Kurzon 2002, which had a similar but somewhat more parochial title. The terminological change from ‘prepositions’ to ‘adpositions’ signals an ambition to ‘broaden the perspectives’ to include also postpositions and the less common circumpositions. Although the editors do not define the book as a contribution to language typology, it appears in a series of typological studies, and therefore it may not be out of place to say that the perspective is still a bit narrower than could be expected from a book in that series. Most of the chapters focus on one single Eurasian language. In only one of the chapters is there an attempt at a larger sample of languages, and even in that case, the languages are overwhelmingly from Eurasia. In addition, the topics addressed in many of the chapters are quite narrow. In some, adpositions even play a rather indirect role. I am afraid that a reader who expects to get a general view of adpositions as a word class and their place in the grammars of human languages will be somewhat disappointed (cf. a very similar remark on Feigenbaum & Kurzon 2002 in Lander 2004). Several of the chapters, however, do discuss issues of considerable general interest.

Noting the difficulty of assigning the English word ago to any traditional part of speech, Dennis Kurzon (209–27) looks at a sample of twenty-six languages from different language families. He finds that there are clear examples of both adpositions and adverbs in the function of ago and concludes that the postpositional analysis of English ago is acceptable, although an analysis as a ‘less prototypical adverb’ is also possible. Kurzon starts the paper by saying that ‘it may be assumed’ that all languages have something corresponding to English ago. I would submit that this should be demonstrated rather than assumed, given that ago constructions are typically used with numerical expressions such as two years and may be of little use in languages without numerals or with very restricted numeral systems. On the whole, it may be observed that words such as ago tend not to belong to any natural classes of expressions. It is not obvious that it makes much sense to try to make them fit into traditional word classes.

Christopher Wilhelm (289–300) discusses the grammaticalization of the Classical Armenian preposition z- ‘concerning, around’ into a prefix with characteristics of a case-marking morpheme. Although most of the Indo-European case system was still preserved in Classical Armenian, the distinction between nominative and accusative was neutralized in nouns. The preposition z-, which was always proclitic to the following word, was instead used as a marker of definite direct objects. What is of particular interest is that z- sometimes appears on both modifiers and head nouns in noun
phrases, which shows how NP-internal agreement may arise. Mentioning Spanish, Romanian, and some Australian languages, Wilhelm notes that while postpositions frequently grammaticalize into case markers, this is ‘far less frequently’ found with prepositions. It is somewhat strange that Wilhelm does not relate object marking in Armenian to the general phenomenon of differential object marking, since it has been discussed extensively in typological work over the last decades and is found in geographically close languages such as Turkish and Persian. An atypical trait of Armenian object marking is the source meaning of the grammaticalizing adposition, ‘concerning, about’. Regrettably, Wilhelm does not give any details about the early historical development of z-

Languages with complex case systems sometimes exhibit intricate patterns of case marking of noun phrases governed by adpositions. Alan Reed Libert (229–55) describes such systems in Turkic languages. The topic has been somewhat neglected in typology. The only general work I have found is an earlier paper by Libert, but curiously it is not referred to in his chapter. Essentially, Libert tries to survey all types of case systems that occur in Turkic languages, but the reader does not get a very clear picture of any individual system as a whole. Thus, despite his statement that all of the six Turkic cases are found with complements of postpositions, it is not clear whether all of the cases are really found in all of the Turkic languages. Of particular interest are those adpositions that can take more than one case. In Turkic languages, the most common pattern seems to be an alternation between nominative and genitive, which may depend on factors such as word class, specificity, and definiteness. Some kind of referentiality hierarchy appears to be at work here, although this is not discussed in the paper.

Two chapters are concerned with finding a ‘Gesamtbedeutung’ for highly abstract and partly grammaticalized adpositions. Lidia Fraczak (171–90) argues that the French prepositions à and de used with a following infinitive are used when the speaker wants to present a fact in an ‘ambivalent’ and ‘monovalent’ way, respectively. Yishai Tobin (273–88) postulates an invariant meaning for the Modern Hebrew prepositions b- ‘in’ and l- ‘to’ as ‘circumstance/condition of part or all of a scene’ and ‘orientation to/toward an entity as a focus, goal, purpose, destination’, respectively. The question that has to be asked for any such analysis is to what degree it is predictive—will it help someone who does not know the language to make the right choice of expression? For instance, it may not be immediately obvious from Tobin’s definitions whether it is hivxin ‘notice’ or muda ‘aware of’ that is to go with the meaning ‘orientation toward’ (it happens to be the latter that takes l-).

Specific issues in Hebrew are also discussed by three other authors. Esther Borochovsky Bar-Aba (67–83) treats the alternation between those verb complements that are preceded by a preposition and those that are not. Irena Botwinik-Rotem (85–114) discusses a somewhat similar problem, the occurrence of a ‘light preposition’ lе in front of the complements of Hebrew locative prepositions. Finally, Tamar Sovran (257–71) analyzes changes in the meaning of ’im ‘with’, acknowledging influence from European languages as an important factor but also stressing cognitive and communicative factors.

Somewhat confusingly, the authors who discuss Hebrew prepositions are not consistent in how they transcribe them. Thus, Tobin uses both notations of b-/l- and be-/le-, while the other authors use belle or be-le-. Apparently they refer to the same set of prepositions, but it may take a little while for a reader who is not familiar with Hebrew to realize that. More subtly, the preposition meaning ‘with’ is called ’im by Sovran, ’im by Borochovsky Bar-Aba, and simply im in the editors’ introduction, leading to three different ways of rendering the ayin character (ו).

Two further chapters are devoted to complex adpositions. Silvia Adler (17–35) looks at French ‘prepositional locutions’ such as à la fin de ‘at the end of’, arguing that many cases included under this rubric in the literature are rather free prepositional phrases. Complex postpositions in Korean and the grammaticalization of adpositions from verbs and nouns are discussed by Injoo Choi-Jonin (133–70). In Korean grammar, there is considerable terminological confusion between the notions of ‘particle’ and ‘postposition’. Despite the author’s effort to disentangle them, it is somewhat difficult for a non-Korean reader to digest the difference.

David J. Allerton (37–65) discusses the structure of English phrases such as far away over the hills. Although they may seem to be ‘two-headed’, he shows that the place adverb far away and the prepositional phrase over the hills in fact each have their specific place and function.
PIERRE CADOT and FRANCK LEBAS (115–32) discuss the role of prepositions in the French expressions *du coup* ‘and so’ and *pour le coup* ‘as a result’. While the latter has a basically compositional semantics, the contribution of the preposition in the former ‘is mainly pragmatic’, according to the authors.

JULIA G. KRIVORUCHKO (191–208) describes the ‘prepositional wars’ that have taken place around the choice of preposition in Russian and Ukrainian expressions meaning ‘in Ukraine’ or ‘to Ukraine’. After the independence of Ukraine in 1991, the traditional preference for the preposition *na* ‘on’ has come to be seen as offensive in both languages, and *v* ‘in’ has gained ground and is now the norm in Ukraine. By contrast, in Russian, the choice between the prepositions is ‘indexical of socio-cultural identities and value-conferring’. Krivoruchko notes that English usage has also changed, from ‘the Ukraine’ to ‘Ukraine’.

I noted some inconsistencies in the transcription of Hebrew above. There are also discrepancies between the chapters, for example, in the glossing of grammatical morphemes and the use of single vs. double quotes. These are petty details but add to the impression of disparateness that arises from the narrowness of the topics and the lack of connections between the chapters.

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This volume consists of an introduction by the editors and eleven articles, each of which addresses some intriguing puzzle about the syntax, semantics, or pragmatics of adjectives and adverbs. The collection as a whole deepens the reader’s understanding of why adjectives and adverbs pose a special challenge to linguistic analysis.

Typically, adverbs and adjectives occur in sentences as nonarguments. They appear to be less syntactically restricted than other parts of the clause (at least in languages like English). For instance, they can occur in various positions in sentences. Yet, if several adjectives/adverbs occur together in a sentence, their relative order to one another is usually restricted. This can be captured in different ways: a syntax-based analysis will assume a comparatively rigid syntactic structure within the adjectival/adverbial parts of the sentence, whereas a semantics-based approach will attempt to derive facts about word order from the ontological nature of modified arguments (Cinque 1999 and Ernst 2002 represent these two opposing camps). Semantics-based approaches lead to a deeper problem at the syntax-semantics interface. The way that adjectives and adverbs are interpreted can differ, and sometimes differs dramatically, depending on their position. Differences may have to do with the lexical content (e.g. *carefully* as a manner vs. an evaluation by the speaker), the arguments of the predicate (e.g. resultative vs. manner readings of *elegantly*), restrictive vs. nonrestrictive modification by adjectives, commentary vs. at-issue interpretations, to name a few. Such facts can be relegated to syntax (‘brute homonymy’ approach), to semantics, or to pragmatics, but any analysis will have to address questions that do not normally arise in the linguistic description of core sentence structure. Finally, the content that adverbs and adjectives contribute to the overall message of the sentence can range at any level between truth-conditional