(oral / poster)

or and *or.be* alternative questions

An areal typology of the languages in China

The present work proposes an *or/or.be* typology in alternative questions. In languages like English and German, disjunctions used in declarative sentences and alternative questions demonstrate no difference, cf. English *or* and German *oder*. In Standard Chinese, however, disjunction *huozhe* 'or' is used in the declarative sentences and *haishi* (or.be) 'or' is used alternative questions.

In a survey of 138 languages in China, 32 languages are found to have a division in *or* and *or.be* in declaratives and alternative questions (*or.be* languages), 25 languages demonstrate no such division (*or* languages), and 81 languages are unknown or irrelevant.

or/or.be merits a typology because some parameters are correlated with this distinction (at least) in many languages in China. For instance, the position of adpositions and the position of disjunctions are two parameters of this kind. In English, a pause can only happen after the first token, but before the disjunction (*A, disjunction B*), i.e. it is of disjunction-preposed type; whereas languages like Naxi (Tibeto-Burman, Sino-Tibetan) are of disjunction-postposed type (*A disjunction, B*). The following is the attested number of languages of the two parameters in *or-* and *or.be*-languages, respectively.

Table 1.   The positions of disjunctions and adpositions in 25 *or*-languages

Disjunctions	Adpositions	Adpositions	Disjunctions
preposed 21	Pr 15, Po 6	Pr 15	preposed 15, postposed 0
postposed 4	Pr 0, Po 4	Po 10	preposed 6, postposed 4

Table 2.   The positions of disjunctions and adpositions in 32 *or.be*-languages

Disjunctions	Adpositions	Adpositions	Disjunctions
preposed 29	Pr 22, Po 7	Pr 23	preposed 22, postposed 0, pre/postposed 1
postposed 2	Pr 0, Po 2	Po 9	preposed 7, postposed 2
pre/postposed 1	Pr 1, Po 0		

It can be seen that *or.be*-languages are more frequently to take prepositions than *or*-languages. More generalizations drawn from the tables above:

(i)   disjunction-preposed languages are more commonly to take prepositions than postpositions;
(ii)   disjunction-postposed languages are postpositional;
(iii)   most prepositional languages are of disjunction-preposed.

More parameters are examined in this work, in terms of the *or/or.be* typology.