

## 85. Order of Adposition and Noun Phrase

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### 1. Defining the values

This map shows the order of adposition and noun phrase. The two primary types of adpositions are **prepositions** and **postpositions**: prepositions precede the noun phrase they occur with, as in English and in the Boumaa Fijian (Austronesian) example in (1a), while postpositions follow the noun phrase they occur with, as in the Lezgian (Nakh-Daghestanian; Russia) example in (1b).

(1) a. Boumaa Fijian (Dixon 1988: 216)

<i>au</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>talai</i>	<i>Elia</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>'Orovou</i>
1SG	FUT	send	Elia	<b>to</b>	'Orovou
				Prep	NP
‘I’ll send Elia to ‘Orovou.’					

## b. Lezgian (Haspelmath 1993: 218)

<i>duxtur-r-in</i>	<i><b>patariw</b></i>	<i>fe-na</i>
doctor-PL-GEN	to	go-AOR
NP	Postp	

‘She went to doctors.’

@ 1.	Postpositions	520
@ 2.	Prepositions	467
@ 3.	Inpositions	7
@ 4.	More than one adposition type with none dominant	52
@ 5.	No adpositions	28
	total	1074

A word is treated here as an adposition (preposition or postposition) if it combines with a noun phrase and indicates the grammatical or semantic relationship of that noun phrase to the verb in the clause. Some languages also employ adpositions to indicate a relationship of a noun phrase to a noun (especially in a genitive/possessive relationship); however, if the only candidates in

a language for adpositions are in the genitive construction, they are not treated as adpositions here.

In some languages, some or all of the functions of adpositions are carried by **case affixes** on nouns, as in the example in (2) from Ngalakan (Gunwinyguan; Northern Territory, Australia).

(2) Ngalakan (Merlan 1983: 46)

*ɲaɲjuɭa-ɲini-?wala ɲu-yerk-gaɲiɲ*

eye-1SG.POSS-**from** 1SG.3SG-come.out-CAUS.PST.PUNCT

‘I removed it from my eye.’

Case affixes and adpositions can be referred to together as **case markers**. While some linguists occasionally apply the terms *preposition* or *postposition* to case affixes with meanings corresponding to prepositions in European languages, case affixes are not treated as adpositions on this map (see Map 51 on case affixes). On the other hand, many languages have case markers which are not separate words phonologically but whose position is still determined syntactically. The most common instances of this

are case markers that are clitics which attach phonologically to the first or last word in the noun phrase, as illustrated by the postpositional clitic in (3) from Kunuz Nubian (Nilo-Saharan; Egypt)

(3) Kunuz Nubian (Abdel-Hafiz 1988: 283)

<i>[eseɣ</i>	<i>kursel]</i> = <b>lo</b>	<i>uski-takki-s-i</i>
[village	old]= <b>LOC</b>	born-PASS-PST-1SG
‘I was born in an old village.’		

Such clitic case markers, which attach to modifiers of the noun if they are at the beginning or end of the noun phrase, are treated here as instances of adpositions since they combine syntactically with noun phrases, even though they are not separate phonological words. A number of languages in which modifiers always precede the noun, and in which the case marker always occurs at the end of the noun phrase (and hence on the noun), are in principle ambiguous as to whether the case marker should be treated as a case suffix or a postpositional clitic; for the purposes of this map, I treat such case markers as case suffixes and not as postpositional clitics.

The map also shows a rare third type of adposition, what I will call **inpositions**, adpositions which occur or can occur inside the noun phrase they accompany. In Anindilyakwa (isolate; Northern Territory, Australia) the inpositions are second-position clitics within the noun phrase, attaching phonologically to the end of the first word in the noun phrase, as in (4), in which the inposition attaches to the word for ‘small’ in the noun phrase meaning ‘small stick’.

(4) Anindilyakwa (Groote Eylandt Linguistics-langwa 1993: 202)

*...narri-ng-akbilyang-uma*                      [*eyukwujiya=manja eka*]

...NC1.PL-NC2-stick.to.end-TA              [small=LOC                      stick]

‘... they stuck them (the feathers) to a little stick.’

In Tümpisa Shoshone (Uto-Aztecan; California), the inpositions appear immediately after the noun and before any postnominal modifiers (if there are any), as in (5).

(5) Tümpisa Shoshone (Dayley 1989b: 257)

[*ohipim ma natii'iwantü-nna*] *tiyaitaiha satü*

[cold.OBJ **from** mean-OBJ]            died            that

‘He died from a mean cold.’

In (5), the inposition *ma* ‘from’ appears between the head noun *ohipim* ‘cold’ and its postnominal modifier *natti’iwantünna* ‘mean’.

Note that the inpositions in Tümpisa Shoshone govern the objective case on pronouns, nouns, and their modifiers (though the case is often null, as in the noun *ohipim* ‘cold’), as shown on the postnominal modifier in (5). This shows that despite appearing inside the noun phrase, the inposition still determines the case inflection of words in that noun phrase. Only seven languages are shown on the map as having inpositions as the dominant adposition type, six of them in Australia.

Some languages have both prepositions and postpositions. While there are some languages in which specific adpositions can be used either as prepositions or as postpositions, in most languages of mixed adposition type, some of the adpositions are always prepositions while others are always postpositions. In some languages with both prepositions and postpositions, one type is considered dominant if there are considerably more adpositions of

one type than the other or if there is reason to believe that one type is considerably more common in usage (see “Determining Dominant Word Order” on p. 371). In Koyra Chiini (Songhay; Mali), for example, there are more than twice as many postpositions as prepositions and the prepositions have more specialized meanings (like ‘without’), while some of the postpositions have fairly basic meanings, suggesting that postpositions are probably much more common in usage (Heath 1999b: 103, 108). If neither type can be considered dominant, then the language is shown on the map as **more than one adposition type with none dominant**, though this also includes rare instances of languages with both postpositions and inpositions, such as Hanis Coos (Oregon Coast family; Frachtenberg 1922b). For example, Koromfe (Gur, Niger-Congo; Burkina Faso and Mali) has only two prepositions and an unclear number of postpositions (but greater than two); however, one of the prepositions has very broad meaning and appears to occur with high frequency, so Koromfe is treated as a language lacking a dominant adposition type (Rennison 1997: 73, 77, 294).

The final type consists of languages which **do not have adpositions**, or at least appear not to. Some such languages only employ case affixes as case markers, as in Yidiny (Pama-Nyungan; Queensland, Australia; Dixon 1977); others lack case markers altogether, as in Kutenai (isolate; western North America). This type is underrepresented on the map because grammars do not generally say if a language lacks adpositions and one can only infer the absence of adpositions from a thorough grammar. Some languages only have one minor adposition; such languages are coded here according to the type of that one adposition. For example, Wardaman (Yangmanic; Northern Territory, Australia) has only one postposition, meaning ‘like’, as in (6).

(6) Wardaman (Merlan 1994: 99)

*mernden      marrajbi    ya-wurr-yanggan*

white.ABS    like                    3.SUBJ-3NSG.OBJ-go.POTENTIAL

‘They have to be like white people.’

The words analysed here as prepositions or postpositions are often referred to by authors of grammars by some other label. For



example, what are treated here as clitic postpositions are often referred to as *case suffixes* in descriptions of languages, and many grammars do not mention that the so-called case suffixes attach to modifiers of the noun rather than to the noun if the modifier is the last element in the noun phrase. Even among adpositions which are not clitics, the words that count here as adpositions are often referred to by some other term. In some grammars, for example, they are called *relators* (e.g. Derbyshire 1985 in reference to postpositions in Hixkaryana). In many languages, the words treated here as adpositions share grammatical properties with nouns or verbs and are often for that reason referred to in grammars as nouns or verbs. These shared properties generally reflect the fact that it is common for nouns and verbs to grammaticalize as adpositions, while often still retaining grammatical properties reflecting their grammaticalization source. For example, in Jakaltek (Mayan; Guatemala), prepositions inflect for their object with the same set of pronominal prefixes that indicate possessors on nouns, and the structure of prepositional phrases is the same as that of noun phrases with possessors. Thus the construction in (7a) mirrors that in (7b).

(7) Jakalte (Craig 1977: 110, 106)

- a.     *y-ul*     *te'*             *ñah*  
           3-in     the.CLF     house  
           ‘in the house’
- b.     *y-ixal naj pel*  
           3-wife CLF     Peter  
           ‘Peter’s wife’

Such situations can either be described by saying that prepositions share certain properties with nouns or by saying that prepositions are a subclass of nouns. It is assumed here that the difference between these two ways of describing the situation is terminological. In fact, while Craig (1977) refers to words like *ul* ‘in’ in (7a) as prepositions, Day (1973: 82), in a different description of the same language, characterizes them as nouns. Thus, the fact that a set of words with adpositional meaning arguably constitute a subclass of some other class, such as nouns or verbs, is not considered here as a reason not to treat them as adpositions.

On the other hand, the fact that certain nouns (or verbs) in a language sometimes translate into prepositions in English is not sufficient grounds for them to be treated here as adpositions. There must be some reason to believe that they have grammaticalized to some extent, that they are to some extent grammatically distinct from other nouns (or verbs). For example, in languages with serial verb constructions, the equivalent of an instrumental adposition is often expressed by a verb meaning ‘use’, as in the example in (8) from Mandarin.

(8) Mandarin (Li and Thompson 1981: 597)

<i>tāmen</i>	<i>yòng</i>	<i>shǒu</i>	<i>chī-fàn</i>
3PL	use	hand	eat-food
‘They eat with their hands.’			

But in the absence of evidence of grammaticalization, an example like that in (8) is not sufficient to conclude that the word *yòng* ‘use’ functions as anything but a normal verb. Conversely, in Maybrat (West Papuan; Papua, Indonesia), there is a word *ae* ‘at’ which is morphologically and syntactically a verb. The example in (9a)

illustrates it functioning as a main verb, while the example in (9b) illustrates it functioning prepositionally.

(9) Maybrat (Dol 1999: 87, 88)

- a.      *y-ae*                      *Sorong*  
                  3SG.M-at              Sorong  
                  ‘He is in Sorong.’
- b.      *ait*              *y-amo*              *m-ae*              *amah*  
                  3SG.M      3SG.M-go              3SG.F-at              house  
                  ‘He goes home.’

However, when *ae* is used prepositionally, as in (9b), it always occurs with a third person singular feminine subject prefix regardless of the person, number, and gender of the subject, indicating that it is grammatically distinct from normal verbs. It thus counts as a preposition for the purposes of this map.

## 2. Geographical distribution

Because adposition type correlates strongly with the order of object and verb (see chapter 95), the distribution of prepositions and postpositions on this map resembles the distribution of object and verb on Map 83. Prepositions predominate in the following areas:

(i) Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East; (ii) central and southern Africa; (iii) a large area extending from Southeast Asia through Indonesia, the Philippines, and the Pacific; (iv) the Pacific Northwest in Canada and the United States; and (v) Mesoamerica.

Postpositions predominate (i) in most of Asia, except in Southeast Asia; (ii) in New Guinea, except in the northwest; (iii) in North America, except in the two areas noted above; and (iv) in most of South America. Postpositions are more common than prepositions in much of Australia, especially among Pama-Nyungan languages, but in the northern part of Northern Territory, both types occur with comparable frequency. In fact, for many Australian languages, especially Pama-Nyungan, there is no evidence of adpositions of any sort. While prepositions predominate in Africa as a whole, there are still many languages with postpositions, including an area in West Africa and one to the northeast. There is one area in Africa stretching from Sudan and Ethiopia southwest into the northeastern

corner of the Democratic Republic of the Congo where the map is quite complex. Languages with no adpositions are most common in Australia and North America, though as noted above, this type is more common than the map suggests.