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Kazym Khanty spatial postpositions and noun PLACE in the PP structure

Locative adpositional phrases are widely regarded as involving lexical and functional levels in their structure, the former being projected from a noun PLACE (first introduced by Katz & Postal 1964). However, how this noun is lexicalized and what the role of locative expressions in PPs is seems to vary across the world's languages: the entities that look like adpositions are stated either to instantiate PLACE itself, head a functional projection above it or be its modifier (Nchare and Terzi 2014, Terzi 2006, Botwinik-Rotem 2008), different adpositions sometimes having different structural positions within the same language. The goal of my talk is to consider the nominal properties of postpositions in Kazym Khanty (< Ob-Ugric < Uralic) and look into their structure. I mostly use the data collected during fieldwork (2021–2023) in Kazym (Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug), as well as the data from dictionaries.

Kazym Khanty postpositions demonstrate varying degrees of nominal flavor. To start with, like nouns, all postpositions obligatorily agree with their pronominal dependents (1):

(1)   a. *λʉw   χot-*(λ)-ən*   b. *λʉw   χonŋ-*(əλ)-ən*
         (s)he   house-POSS.3SG-LOC   (s)he   near-POSS.3SG-LOC
         'in his/her house'   'near him/her'

So-called "serial" postpositions (ones that take different case markers rather than only being encountered with the same one) can also be inflected for number at least by some speakers (2) and used in subject and direct object positions (3).

(2)   %*mʉŋ   jʉ-pi[1]-λ-əw-ən   ar   χujat   λoλ´*
         we.PL   back-RN-PL-POSS.1PL-LOC   many   person   stand.NPST[3SG]
         {There are multiple queues, each of us is standing in a different one} 'There is a lot of
         people behind each of us'
(3)   *tăm   amp-en   păsan   iλ-pe-λ   tăλaŋtɛλn   wʉ-s-λe*
         this   dog-POSS.2SG   table   bottom-RN-POSS.3SG   fully   take-PST-3SG>SG
         'This dog has taken up all the space under the table'

Such nominal properties of Kazym Khanty postpositions can be accounted for by adopting the PP structure involving a projection of a noun PLACE with the ground as its possessor. I claim that at least the serial postpositions should be viewed as lexicalizations of PLACE (rather than its modifiers or lexicalizations of some functional projection above it).

One of the things to consider is the fact that Kazym Khanty has a number of particular sets of locative expressions. Such a set usually includes a preverb, various adverbs, an adnominal modifier and an entity that functions either as a relational noun or as a serial postposition. Importantly, the relational noun/serial postposition is the *only* element in the set that can take possessor-like dependents (that refer to the object a part of which or an area adjacent to which is described by the relational noun/serial postposition) (4).

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[1] The suffix *-pi* attaches to locative stems to form a relational noun denoting either a part of an object (e.g. 'backside') or an area near an object (e.g. 'the area behind'). For the lack of a better option, it is annotated as RN (relational noun), in the sense that it is used to derive relational nouns

(4) a. *wurŋa   juχ   ɵχtij-ən oməs-λ,   ??(juχ) iλ-pij-ən   kăt´i šɵšijəλ*
     crow   tree   on-LOC   sit-NPST[3SG] tree   bottom-RN-LOC   cat   walk.NPST[3SG]
   b. *wurŋa   juχ   ɵχtij-ən oməs-λ,   (*juχ) iλ-ən   kăt´i šɵš-ijλ*
     crow   tree   on-LOC   sit-NPST[3SG] tree   bottom-LOC   cat   walk.NPST[3SG]
   'A crow is sitting in the tree, and a cat is wandering down below'

Considering the ground to be the dependent of a silent PLACE requires an additional explanation as to why the relational member of the locative expression set cooccurs with it rather than a non-relational one. This problem does not arise if we view the serial postposition itself as the lexicalization of PLACE. On the other hand, it is less tempting to view non-serial postpositions as such, as they have fewer nominal properties.

The structural position of non-serial postpositions can be determined more precisely by looking into NP-ellipsis. Low adnominal dependents such as adjectives cannot occur by themselves in elliptical contexts and require a nominal head. Higher-level dependents (numerals, demonstratives, pronominal possessors) can be used on their own, however, in such cases, a special "argument" form is used (while the "attributive" form occurs as an adnominal dependent, e.g. *śi(*t) χɵ* 'this person' vs. *śi*(t)-λ-an tʉw-e* 'bring these ones') that can be analyzed as involving a nominalizing morpheme. Generally speaking, when a noun is not pronounced in Kazym Khanty, its suffixes do not *just* attach to the nearest modifier, which supports regarding non-serial Ps as heads of a functional projection above PLACE rather than being its modifiers. This projection can belong to the category of Axial Parts (see Svenonius 2006), which often bear some resemblance to nouns while being a class of their own.

Lastly, I assume the spatial case markers to be functional heads of category P, determining the type of motion (either static or non-static, see Kracht 2002). It is hard to regard them as occupying the same projection as the roots of non-serial postpositions (as they co-occur in the same form) or a forming a single entity with them (as they are separated by possessive affixes)

To sum up, I propose that Kazym Khanty PP structure does have a lexical part projected from a PLACE noun in constructions with serial postpositions, which lexicalize this noun. Non-serial postpositions can be viewed as heads of the Axial Part category, and spatial case markers as P heads.

Abbreviations
X>X — subject-object agreement; 1, 2, 3 — 1-st, 2-nd, 3-rd person; CVB — converb; FREQ — frequentative; LOC — locative; NPST — non-past; POSS — possessive; PL — plural; PST — past; RN — suffix attaching to a locative stem to form a relational noun; SG — singular.

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