Chinese PPs
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PPs in Chinese, as in Dutch and German, display internal word order disharmony: they include prepositional, postpositional, and circumpositional phrases. This talk argues that all three belong to the category PP, contrary to the claim that postpositions are nouns (e.g. Li 1990, Huang/Li/Li 2009). As noted by Svenonius (2007), Chinese PPs instantiate the hierarchical universal ([Path [Place]]), with path-denoting prepositions selecting place-denoting postpositional phrases. The relative order of preposition and postposition reflects a general property of Sinitic languages: case-licensing categories are always head-initial. DP complements of Place postpositions move to the left edge of PlaceP, where they check their case feature with a Path-denoting preposition or the light p zài in circumpositional phrases of the form [Prep Prep [PostP DP Postp]]. In other contexts, the case feature of the postpositional complement is checked by a higher functional head, such as v in verbal projections, or T in locative inversion sentences. The co-existence of prepositions and postpositions illustrates the “mixed” nature of Chinese, where T, v/V, Path, and Det are head initial, but C, N, and Place are head final; the ordering properties of each of these projections can be accounted for by the principle that only head-initial categories check case. From a diachronic standpoint, coexistence of prepositions and postpositions is due to their distinct sources: prepositions were reanalyzed from verbs, postpositions from nouns. Each retains the case-checking and ordering properties of the source category. From the synchronic standpoint of the language learner, the “mixed” properties of Chinese PPs result from the hierarchical universal path-over-place and the language-particular parameter setting that restricts case checking to head-initial categories.