

VERBS vs ADPOSITIONS AS MARKERS OF SPATIAL MEANINGS (oral or poster)

Adpositions relate core, or non-core, complements to verbal predicates. This is recalled by example (1). The present contribution aims at comparing verbs and adpositions as markers of spatial meanings. Spatial adpositions may be, like verbs, semantically complex. Thus, they often have a deictic value, as shown by (2). In addition, spatial adpositions, again like verbs, are often, diachronically, the sources of tense and aspect marking, as in Old Egyptian, where equative, present, and future were marked by former prepositions: cf. (3). Similarly, (4) and (5) show that the spatial meaning of adpositions equivalent to English “after” yields progressive and hot past markers in Haitian creole and Irish respectively. Not only do spatial adpositions exhibit a semantic complexity which makes them comparable to verbs, but they also share two further characteristics with verbs: they are polysemic, as shown by (6), and spatial adpositional phrases can even function as predicates, whether static as in (7) or dynamic as in (8).

However, spatial adpositions, unlike verbs in sentences whose predicate is not nominal, are not always indispensable. Thus, in Swahili, even though many spatial phrases require adpositions, as shown by (9a), some do not, among them loan-words like those in (9b). Furthermore, in many languages verbs are sufficient to mark spatial meanings without the participation of adpositions, as shown by (10), from Jabêm

Moreover, some languages are poor in spatial adpositions. The job of marking spatial meanings is then often done by verb-chaining. Zulu, which has no Path-denoting prepositions, incorporates Path into verbs, like *ngena* “go into”, which are non-specific with respect to Manner-of-motion, hence their association with verbs specifying it, like *gijima* “run”, as in example (11). Another verbal strategy to mark spatial meaning is the combination of affix-marked motion with verb-marked manner-of-motion, found even in languages which are reputed to be verb-framed, like French, illustrated by example (12). Finally, applicatives provide a means to mark spatial contents. Tswana *ko-* and Bemba *ku-* are the Bantu local classifiers, distinct from adpositions, so that neither (13) nor (14) contain adpositions. But the job of adpositions is done by the insertion of an applicative affix, with interesting semantic effects: (13b) means that the death of the person referred to is an already known fact, i.e. a topic, and that, unlike in (13a), only the fact that the death occurred in Europe is a new

information; in (14b), the applicative means that the return took place while the persons referred to were in the village, hence it is implied that the village is the place of departure, while (14) simply refers to a motion from one point to another.

In conclusion, although adpositions and verbs have much in common, if only because transitive verbs and adpositions are both complement-taking, there are interesting differences between the ways these two parts of speech function with respect to the marking of spatial meanings: adpositions are important tools, but, unlike predicative verbs, they are not indispensable.