The PLACE Classifiers min and dou in Cantonese Spatial PPs

This study concerns the syntactic structure of spatial prepositional phrases in Cantonese, with focus on the suffix -dou, under the light of cartographic approach in the recent literature. The Cantonese prepositional phrases are normally realized as Preposition (P) + Ground Noun Phrase (NPground) + Localizer (L):

(1)  (a) hai go soeng leoi-min
     At CL box inside-face
     ‘in the box’  
(b) hai tousyugun cin-min
     At library front-face
     ‘in front of the library’

In English ‘complex’ prepositions contains a noun-like place word, sometimes called the Axial Part (Svenonius 2010, Cinque 2010, Wu 2011), to certain extent, resembling the Chinese localizer. Although a ‘simple’ preposition appears in the English translations in (1a) and a ‘complex’ one in (1b), the Chinese data in both (a) and (b) have overt Axial Parts. From the perspective of cartography such difference can be explained by the assumption that all these spatial expressions indeed have one and the same syntactic structure with so many projections that are sufficient to accommodate all overt elements in all natural languages, where the seemingly lacking elements are either silent (Kayne 2005) or spelled out by other overt elements (Svenonius 2010:131), plus appropriate movements.

In contrast to the widely accepted claim that Mandarin Axial Parts with mian (the corresponding element of min in Cantonese) are nouns, I show with syntactic evidence that the Axial Part + mian/min is actually a spell out of a syntactic structure in which Axial Part is a head whose complement is ClassifierP where mian/min are classifiers, which probably selects a silent NPPLACE as complement:

(2)  [AxialPartP Axial Part [ClP mian/min [NP PLACE ]]]

I suggest the following criteria for an element to be categorized as a classifier:

(3)  (a) able to follow a numeral; (b) able to follow a demonstrative; (c) able to reduplicate to yield universal quantification; (d) unable to follow a classifier, except in its own reduplication

Cinque (2010) comes to a rich internal structure of spatial PPs in general:

(4)  [PPdir [PPstat [DPplace [DegP [ModeDirP [AbsViewP [RelViewPup/down [RelViewPin/out [DecticP [AxPartP X®[PP P [NPplace DP [PLACE]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]

In Cantonese the suffix -dou seems to spell out the PLACE noun in the above structure: gungjyun-dou, literally ‘park place’, referring to the place near or in the park. However, the deictic place word go-dou, literally ‘that place’, meaning there, posts a problem to the analysis that -dou is a PLACE noun when we consider the word order of expressions like

(5)  gungjyun hau-min go-dou
     park back-side that-place
     ‘(the place) behind the park’

(6)  Keoi hai go gungjyun hau-min sam-sap mai go-dou tiumou.
     He at CLF park back-face thirty metre that-DOU dance
     ‘He is dancing thirty metres from behind the park.”
We have to either give up the analysis that –dou here spells out PLACE or postulate a more complicated structure and a series of movements so that the deictic go finally follows the string DPGround + Axial Part but precedes PLACE. This study intends to solve this dilemma. Notice that (6) can in fact be spelt out with morpheme GE, whose status is yet to determine among C element, D element, linker, or modifier marker.

(7) Keoi hai go gungjyun GE hau-min GE sam-sap mai go-dou tiumou.
   He at CLF park GE back-face GE thirty metre that-DOU dance

It is argued in Cinque (2005, 2010b) that demonstrative projects higher than the modifiers of adjectives and relative clauses, which are in turn higher than the noun. Besides in Chinese classifier is between the Dem and the adjectives and relative clauses. I suppose the locative PPs in Cantonese has the same order as its DPs where DegP, AxialPartP and some other modifiers follow Dem and Cl and precede the NP_{PLACE}.

(8) (a) Dem > Cl > … RCs … > … > As > … > NP
    (b) P_{loc} > Dem > Cl > … DegP … > … AxialPartP … > NP_{PLACE}

The roll-up movements in pied-piping fashion (as described in Cinque 2005) start with NP_{PLACE} (with DPGround being its Spec), with each GE indicating one roll-up. Such analysis implies that first, go-dou ‘there’, though looks like one constituent, is in fact a result of movements; second, the Deitic projection is higher than Degree, which is different from the inventories in Svenonius (2010) and Cinque (2010); third, the functional heads realized as GE in the Cantonese PPs are structurally always there even though they are not obligatorily pronounced in many cases.

As far as I know no one in the literature claim that min and dou in Cantonese and mian in Mandarin are classifiers. Some predictions are vindicated. First, dou is a Cl but not a PLACE noun and thus merges just below Dem, which matches the phenomenon that li-dou ‘this DOU, here’ and go-dou ‘there’ behave like a non-separable word.

If min is assumed to modify a silent PLACE noun, then the nominal properties of the Axial Parts with the fact that it cannot be preceded by a classifier can be accounted for, since the Axial Part suffix is actually a classifier and in Chinese presumably there are no double classifiers except when a Cl reduplicates to yield universal quantification.

Reference


