
Directional interpretations for the Mandarin locative ZAI ‘be at’

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This paper argues that directional interpretations for the locative morpheme ZAI in Mandarin Chinese may come from (i) the structural configuration or (ii) verb meaning. Directional ZAI arises with inherently directional verbs (Gehrke’s (2008) ‘put’ verbs) (1), e.g. *fang* ‘put’, *diao* ‘fall’, whether pre- (parenthesized ()) or post-verbally (square bracketed []).

- (1) ta (**zai zhuo-shang** [fang-le ben shu) **zai zhuo-shang**]
3sg be.at table-upon put-PERF CL book be.at table-upon
‘(S)he put a book on the table.’ (dir)

Directional ZAI is optionally available with manner of motion verbs, but only post-verbally (3). With manner of motion verbs, pre-verbal ZAI only has a locative interpretation (Tai 1972).

- (2) wuya fei **zai kong-zhong**
crow fly be.at space-centre
‘The crow flew in(to) the air.’ (dir or loc)

The asymmetry between pre- and post-verbal positions for directional ZAI argues against a polysemy analysis for ZAI or manner of motion verbs: If *fei* ‘fly’ or ZAI had both manner and result senses, pre-verbal ZAI should also allow a directional interpretation. I argue that (1) exemplifies a lexical source for directional ZAI, while (2) exemplifies a configurational source, i.e. the verb+ZAI structure, which I argue forms a compound. I derive directional V-ZAI in (2) via Rothstein’s (2004) RSUM operation (3).

- (3) $\text{RSUM}[\text{fly}', [\text{ZAI in.the.air}]] = \lambda y \lambda e \exists e_1 \exists e_2 [e = {}^S(e_1 \sqcup e_2) \ \& \ \text{fly}'(e_1, y) \ \& \ \text{Loc}(y, \text{in.the.air})(e_2) \ \& \ \text{TPCONNECT}(\text{Cul}(e_1), e_2, y)]$

References: • Gehrke, Berit (2008): *Ps in motion: On the syntax and semantics of P elements and motion events* PhD thesis, Utrecht University. • Rothstein, S. (2004): *Structuring Events*. Blackwell. • Tai, J. H.-Y. (1972): On two functions of place adverbials in Mandarin Chinese. *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* 3, 154–79.