

Motivating a cartographic representation of polysemous Arabic

PPs and axial expressions

Abdelkader Fassi Fehri
The ACVL Project at the Linguistic Society of Morocco,
and Emeritus, Mohammed V University
abdelkaderfassifehri@gmail.com

Maather Alrawi
King Abdulaziz University
maather.alrawi@gmail.com

Arabic prepositions and axial expressions are semantically rich elements, which operate in various domains, including space, time, degree, or force dynamics. Their semantic complexity in Arabic has often been dealt with from a cognitive perspective (Lentzner, 1977; Essessy, 2010; Jan, 2018). It remains unclear, however, how the polysemy can be adequately represented in syntax.

Cross-linguistically, the relational meaning encoded by spatial prepositions has been dealt with using a Place/Path distinction. Prepositions that express a locative meaning project as Place heads whereas those that express a directional meaning project as Path heads (Svenonius 2010, 2012). More recently, Arabic prepositions and spatial nouns have been argued to encode a third motion meaning, in addition to location and direction (Fassi Fehri & Alrawi 2021, 2023). Regardless of whether the spatial expression syntactically surfaces as a preposition or a noun, the locative/directional/motional meaning is associated with its root $\sqrt{\text{}}$, assuming a split between root syntax and category syntax. The [LOC/DIR/MOT] feature of the root explains why a locative preposition, whose root is [LOC], may not be replaced by a directional preposition, whose root is [DIR]. To illustrate, compare $\sqrt{\text{fii}}$ ‘in’ to $\sqrt{\text{?ilaa}}$ ‘to’ in (1) and (2):

- (1) a. r-rajul-u fii l-bayt-i b. * r-rajul-u ?ilaa l-bayt-i
the-man-NOM in the-house-GEN the-man-NOM in the-house-GEN
‘The man is in the house.’
- (2) a. saafar-tu ?ilaa l-qaahirat-i b. *saafar-tu fii l-qaahirat-i
traveled-I to the-Cairo-GEN traveled-I in the-Cairo-GEN
‘I traveled to Cairo.’

However, the [LOC]/[DIR] distinction cannot account for the awkwardness of the constructions in (3). More geometric features are needed to account for these negative results:

- (3) a. *t-?aawilat-u taht-a l-kitaab-i

the-table-NOM under-ACC the-book-GEN

Intended to mean: 'The book is on the table.'

b. *l-masjid-u jaanib-a l-sayyarat-i c.

the-mosque-NOM next-ACC the-car-GEN

Intended to mean: 'The car is next to the mosque.'

The locational root must be endowed with [SIZE] and [STABILITY], and it entails that the Ground is bigger and more stable than the Figure. Also among the geometric features is [\pm CONTACT], which differentiates $\sqrt{\text{ʕala}}$ 'on from $\sqrt{\text{fawq}}$ 'above':

(4) *ta-ṭiiru ṭ-ṭaaʕirat-u fawq-a/*ʕala bayt-i-na*

3F-fly the-plane-NOM over-ACC/on house-GEN-our

'The plane is flying over our house.'

Only under a motivated fine-grained cartographic representation of the geometric (and semantic) specifications can the ill-formedness/oddness be explained (Svenonius *ibid*, Fassi Fehri & Alrawi *ibid*).

Keywords: small p, rootP, Place; Path; AxPart; spatial representation

References

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