The secret nominal life of Afrikaans intransitive adpositions

Erin Pretorius

Department of General Linguistics, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa
E-mail: epretorius@uwc.ac.za

Abstract
Languages like Afrikaans are sometimes said to feature a class of adpositions that can be described as "intransitive" (e.g. *binne* "inside", *bo* "upstairs", *agter* "in the back", *buite* "outside", *onder* "downstairs" *voor* "in the front"). It is argued that such elements in fact instantiate a "hybrid" category – the *locative noun* category – which is not *missing* a Ground external argument but is actually lexicalising the nominal structure associated with that Ground argument itself. Such locative nouns pattern with R-pronouns and *home*-class nouns and therefore probably share a similar internal structure with these better-studied elements of language.

Keywords: intransitive adposition, axial part, locative noun, R-pronoun, syncretism, Afrikaans

1. Introduction

The focus of this paper is Afrikaans intransitive adpositions, which are exhaustively listed in (1). For ease of reference, we will refer to these elements as the *binne* ("inside")-class.

(1)   *Jan sit binne /bo   / agter /buite   /onder / voor.*
       Jan sits inside /above/ behind /outside /under / front
       "Jan is sitting inside/ upstairs/ in the back/ outside/ downstairs/ in the front."
                                                                      [AFRIKAANS]

Other West Germanic languages like Dutch possess an apparently analogous *binne*-class (2).[1] The limited scope of this paper does not, however, permit any cross-linguistic comparison.

(2)   *Marie zit binnen/ boven /achter /buiten /beneden.*
       Marie sits inside / upstairs behind   outside/downstairs
       "Marie is sitting inside/outside/downstairs/upstairs/in the back."
                                              [DUTCH; adapted from Broekhuis 2013: 133]

---

[1] Aboh (2010) suggests that the members of this class are internally complex, comprising two P elements in a possession relation. Given the (almost) consistent presence some prefixal element *b(e)-* (and a suffix *-e(n)*), this endeavour seems compelling. But it is not straighforward, and so must at present remain a topic for future research.

Though members of the *binne*-class alone supply Afrikaans with its inventory of intransitive spatial adpositions, each member of this class has a transitive counterpart.[2] That is, each optionally takes a DP$_{GROUND}$ complement (3).[3]

(3)   *Jan sit   binne / agter / voor   / buite   die konservatorium.*
        Jan sits inside/ behind/ in front of / outside the conservatory
        "Jan is sitting inside/ behind/ in front of/ outside the conservatory."   [AFRIKAANS]

I argue that the difference between the "intransitive" incarnation of *binne*-class adpositions, illustrated in (1), and the transitive incarnation, illustrated in (3), involves a micro-categorial distinction, and that *binne*-class adpositions are syncretic (=systematically homophonous) between these two micro-categories.[4] The micro-category instantiated by the transitive adposition is the better-studied locative preposition (P$_{LOC}$), whereas that instantiated by the "intransitive" adposition is a "hybrid" category, namely *locative noun*. I argue that locative nouns are importantly different from "ordinary" referential nouns in that they carry deictic information. This information is structurally encoded by a node AXPART (*axial part;* Svenonius 2006a). Locative nouns are also importantly different from "ordinary" P$_{LOC}$-expressing adpositions in that they themselves encode the Ground argument. By implication, then, "intransitive" *binne*-class adpositions are not underlyingly intransitive, nor are they adpositions in the typical sense.

2. Distributional Characteristics of Locative Nouns

Locative nouns distribute with the locative R-pronouns *hier* "here" and *daar* "there".[5,6] Both can substitute "full" locative PPs (4), but not directional PPs (5), and to achieve a directional interpretation with a locative noun or R-pronoun, a directional adposition is required (6).

---

[2] I draw a distinction between the intransitive use of *binne*-class adpositions and verbal particles (e.g. *op* ("on") in *Jan sit sy hoed op;* lit.: Jan puts his hat on)). Such particles are sometimes also referred to in the literature as "intransitive adpositions", but I suggest that they constitute rather a distinct class of P element, and therefore warrant rather a different analysis (cf. Pretorius 2017: 257-259 for discussion).

[3] Talmy's (1987; 2000) terms *Figure* and *Ground* are now standard terms in the spatial P literature for denoting the external and internal arguments of adpositions, respectively.

[4] It seems worth noting that the intransitive incarnation of the *binne*-class cannot receive an "unaccusative" analysis, i.e. in parallel with unaccusative verbs, where what appears to be an external argument is in fact a raised internal argument. That is so because DPs like *die beker* ("the mug") in expressions like (i) are interpreted as Figures (i.e. bona fide external arguments) and not Grounds. Expressions like (ii) seem to confirm that the sole argument in (i) is not underlyingly an internal argument.

      (i)   Jan sit   die beker binne.   (ii)   Jan sit   die beker binne die wasbak.
                Jan puts the mug   inside   Jan puts the mug   inside the basin
                "Jan is putting the mug inside."   "Jan is putting the mug inside the basin."

[5] R-pronouns are so named by van Riemsdijk (1978) for the phonological /-r/ ending of the members of this class in Dutch, i.e. *hier* ("here"), *daar* ("there"), *waar* ("where"). Cf. also Koopman (2000); den Dikken (2010) on R-pronouns in Dutch PPs, Kayne (2004) on R-pronouns *here* and *there* in English, and Biggs (2014) on *zhèr* ("here"), *nàr* ("there"), and *nǎr* ("where") in Mandarin.

[6] The R-pronoun *daar* is poly-functional in Afrikaans. Specifically, it may function as either (i) a locative pronoun with "P" categorial status meaning "(over) there", (ii) a demonstrative pronoun with "N" categorial status meaning "that", and (iii) a non-demonstrative pronoun also with "N" categorial status meaning "it". This paper is concerned solely with the locative R-pronouns.

(4)   *Jan sit [op die stoep] / [buite]   / [daar].*
        Jan sits on the porch / outside /   there
        "Jan is sitting one the porch / outside / there."

(5)   *Jan draf [om   die dam] / #[buite   /daar].*
        Jan jogs around the dam /   outside / there
        "Jan is jogging around the dam / outside/there."
        (Where "outside/there" is locative only)

(6)   *Jan draf buite   / daar   om.*
        Jan jogs outside / there around
        "Jan is jogging (all the way) around the outside."
        "Jan is jogging (all the way) around there (=the perimeter of that space)."

The fact that the locative noun *buite* and the R-pronoun *daar* felicitously substitute (i) the (DP$_{GROUND}$-containing) PP in (4) as well as (ii) the DP$_{GROUND}$ of the directional adposition *om* in (5) evidences a noun-like status.

A further distributional property of R-pronouns (in Dutch, and also in Afrikaans), is that they must surface to the left of the selecting P, even when that P is otherwise exclusively prepositional (van Riemsdijk 1978). Locative nouns also share this distributional property. Consider for instance that in the "full" PP *om die dam* in (5), the DP$_{GROUND}$ *die dam* is to the right of the selecting adposition *om*; in (6) where the locative noun *buite* and the R-pronoun *daar* substitute the DP$_{GROUND}$, both surface to the left of the adposition.

Finally, locative nouns and R-pronouns pattern the same in circumpositional phrases: (7a) shows the route-circumposition *met…langs* with a regular DP$_{GROUND}$; in (7b) the DP$_{GROUND}$ is substituted with a locative noun and an R-pronoun.

(7)   (a)   *Ons wandel altyd   met die rivier langs.*
                we   stroll   always with the river along
                "We always stroll along the river."

        (b)   *Ons wandel altyd   binne / hier   langs.*
                we   stroll   always inside / here   along
   "We always stroll along the inside / here

As (7b) shows, the preposition *met* is omitted when the DP$_{GROUND}$ of a circumposition is a locative noun or R-pronoun. *Home*-class nouns (Collins 2007), which in Afrikaans include place names (e.g. *Bellville*) and "highly-frequented" spaces (e.g. *huis,* "home"), share this distributional property. For instance, contrast (7a) above with the expression containing the *home*-class noun in (8) and see that it patterns with the locative noun and R-pronoun-containing expressions in (7b).

(8)   *Ons ry   altyd   Bellville / grondpad   langs.*
        we   drive always Bellville / ground-road along
        "We always drive via Bellvile / along the dirt road."

3. Analysis

An important component of the analysis is that it should capture, in a systematic way, the syncretism of *binne*-class adpositions; that is, their tendency to function as either "ordinary" locative adpositions (recall (3)) or locative nouns. I claim an adequate understanding of this phenomenon requires an interface perspective; that is, one on the interaction between syntactic structure and lexical material. I propose the late-insertion analysis detailed in (9-10), where (9) represents the "shape" of *binne*-class lexical entries, (10a) represents the structure these elements lexicalise when functioning as locative nouns, and (10b) the structure they lexicalise when functioning as locative adpositions. In the diagrams, P_{LOC} represents a place-denoting node typically lexicalised in Afrikaans by locative adpositions; AXPART (*axial part*; Svenonius 2006a) represents a space that is projected around some part of the Ground and is the locus of deictic information. More detailed discussion of axial part follows below.

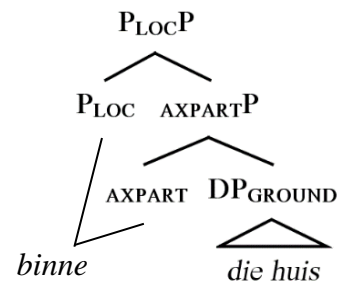(9)   LEXICON: (each *binne*-class adposition comprises a single lexical entry)
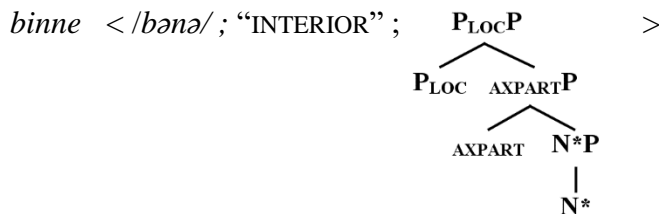
$$binne \quad </bənə/\ ;\ \text{“INTERIOR”}\ ;\quad P_{LOC}P \qquad >$$

(10)   SYNTAX: (distinct insertion sites for the same *binne*-class adposition)
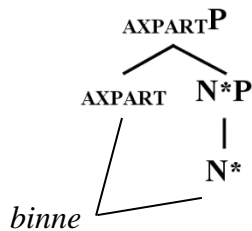
(a)   Locative noun   (b)   Adposition

The lexical entry in (9) should be read as follows: there is a lexical entry for a linguistic element *binne*, which is pronounced /bənə/, which is associated with the encyclopaedic content "INTERIOR", and which qualifies for insertion into a contiguous (sub)set of the hierarchical formal sequence N*<AXPART<P_{LOC}, where N* is a lexical noun which denotes a PLACE and which is "deficient" in the sense that it lacks the ability to project functional structure associated with the category D.[7],[8] The conceptual underpinnings of this sequence are important: I follow

---

[7] In this sense N* could equated with (a projection like) PLACE in the work of Katz and Postal (1964) and Kayne (2004). Cf. the discussion below for a short elaboration.

[8] It is not possible to include discussion of the technical details surrounding the mechanisms governing matching and insertion, or the larger theoretical assumptions implicit in the analysis. Briefly, however, matching is governed by the *Superset Principle* (Caha 2007), and insertion takes place according to the *Elsewhere Condition* (Kiparsky 1973). Furthermore, the presence of a D layer in structures underlying expressions with "full" DP$_{GROUND}$ arguments like (10b) prevents the entry in (9) from lexicalising the N in such expressions. Cf. Pretorius 2017 for detailed

e.g. Ramchand and Svenonius (2014) in adopting a system where the formal features comprising the functional spine are syntactico-semantic in nature. These are probably drawn into the linguistic system during language learning from a conceptual system outside of the language faculty. The fixed order[9] in which these features combine reflects their conceptual origin: as each instance of merge must preserve compositionality, features cannot be merged in a sequence that turns out a conceptually non-valid structure. I take AXPART to represent a type-shift from the region occupied by an object to a vector space projected around (a part of) that object, and P_{LOC} to identify a point within that space.[10] I argue here that the AXPART node is also a locus of spatial deixis, which is sensitive to speaker perspective.[11]

The insertion scenarios in (10) should be read as follows: As regards (10a), there is a derivation in which syntax merges AXPART with a "decifient" noun N*, and *binne* is inserted to lexicalise [AXPART [N*]]. This insertion site makes *binne* a locative noun.

As regards (10b), there is a derivation in which syntax merges AXPART with a DP and subsequently merges P_{LOC} with AXPARTP, and *binne* lexicalises AXPART and P_{LOC}. DP is lexicalised as a "regular" DP_{GROUND}, probably as part of a distinct phase. Whereas the N*P in (10a) constitutes a "defective" phase, allowing one and the same element *binne* to lexicalise structure that would otherwise fall on two sides of a phase boundary, the DP in (10b) is a non-defective phase. In line with Kayne (2004), the defectiveness of the N*P in (10a) could be understood to follow from the nature of a "silent" lexical noun PLACE embedded in such structure (cf. e.g. (11)). Nouns like PLACE are unable to identify the extended structure associated non-defective (phasal) DPs.

The structure proposed in (10a) for *binne*-class locative nouns is in line with that proposed by c for locative adverbials/R-pronouns in English (*here, there, where*; (11)), which is built upon by Kayne (2004). It is also in line with what Collins (2007) proposes for *home*-class nouns.

---

discussion and implementation of these mechanisms in a working system modelling Spellout. The architecture of the grammar is in line with that assumed by Nanosyntax, although the analysis is not carried out in that framework.

[9] Ramchand and Svenonius (2014) argue that the order of the functional sequence is not rigid across the board.

[10] Cf. Zwarts and Winter (2000), Kracht (2002; 2008) and Svenonius (2006a,b; 2008) for discussion and formal definitions. Note that although there is consensus around the idea of (a) syntactic node(s) denoting the projection of vector space in the structure of locative expressions, there is still debate around the precise nature and position of such (a) node(s).

[11] As a brief illustration of how this deictic component functions, consider the expression *there is a lizard on top of the hat*. The axial part in this expression is *top* which differs from the nominal *the top* in the sense that the latter is inherent to the Ground object (i.e. the intrinsic top of the hat), whereas the former relies on speaker perspective (i.e. the part of the hat facing upward relative to the speaker's perspective). In the case of an upturned hat, the lizard may in fact be on the hat's intrinsic bottom. Cf. Svenonius (2006b) for discussion.

(11)

$$Adverb_{Locative}$$

Preposition   Noun Phrase

at   *Definite*   *Noun*

the   is/at   *pro*

PLACE
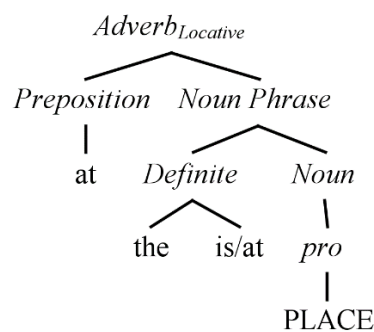
(Katz and Postal 1964; from Pantcheva 2008: 307)

In line with what Svenonius (2006a) proposes about the nature of axial parts, the AXPART node in (9-10) could be considered equivalent to the locus of proximal/distal information in Katz and Postal's (1964) structure, i.e. the *Definite* complex in spec-*Noun* (*this/that*). In locative nouns, this "deictic" node is endowed with richer encyclopaedic content, but the function is the same: a mapping from the region occupied by the Ground object to vectors in space which, crucially, takes speaker perspective into account (cf. fn. 9 for illustration). It is this deictic quality of AXPART especially which makes the proposed analysis of locative nouns amenable to existing accounts of R-pronouns and *home*-class nouns. The next section continues with a short discussion of the relevance of this deictic quality, and the position of the AXPART node in the functional hierarchy.

4. Axial Part, Speaker Perspective, and Category Hybridity

The deictic quality of the AXPART node mentioned above ties in with Biberauer, van Heukelum and Duke's (this volume) argument that there is a Speaker/Hearer-perspective node/zone at the edge of every phase. If Biberauer et al's argument is right, we expect to find Speaker/Hearer-perspective related structure "on the cusp" between what might be considered the "N" and the "P" zones/phases of syntax. Arguably that is precisely where much cross-linguistic research on AXPART locates this node.[12]

Furthermore, being "on the cusp", we might expect AXPART to be lexicalised by "nominal" lexical material in some languages/contexts, and by "adpositional" material in others. I have presented some evidence in this paper that AXPART in Afrikaans is lexicalised by prototypically "P" lexical material.[13] Svenonius (2006a) originally shows, however, that axial parts in English are syncretic with nouns. Such "on the cusp" structural positions therefore seem to play a crucial role in category hybridity in and across languages, and may also turn out to be target positions for Speaker/Hearer perspectives in syntactic structure, and influence the route that grammaticalization takes in different languages.

---

[12] Cf. Pantcheva (2006) on Persian, Muriungi (2006) on Kîîtharaka, and Svenonius (2006) for Korean and other languages.

[13] Importantly, I do not wish to claim that the *binne*-class locative nouns, which form the focus of this paper, instantiate the syntactic category axial part, despite giving lexical expression to the AXPART node. I therefore wish to maintain an important distinction between formal features like AXPART and the syntactic categories they give rise to when lexicalised by linguistic material (where they may or may not be morphologically "packaged" with other formal features). Cf. e.g. Wiltschko (2014), Pretorius (2017) for approaches in which syntactic categories are composite, interface objects and not necessarily reducible to the identity of any single syntactic node.

5. Conclusion

This short paper underscored the fact that *binne*-class adpositions function as members of distinct micro-categories, i.e. "regular" locative adpositions as well as locative nouns (the so-called "intransitive" adpositions). It was shown that these *binne*-class locative nouns, which are relatively understudied, exhibit much of the same syntactic behaviour as R-pronouns and *home*-class nouns, which are better understood. On a par with what has been argued for the internal structure of R-pronouns and *home*-class nouns, *binne*-class locative nouns were analysed as a "hybrid" N-P category incorporating a Ground argument and a deictic component (AXPART).

The paper also proposed a "framework" for understanding the dual category membership of the *binne*-class. Namely, it is useful to conceptualise category as an interface phenomenon arising as a result of how lexical material is mapped onto syntactic structure. Finally, attention was drawn to the fact that the node AXPART in languages like English is associated with typically nominal lexical material, whereas it is associated with typically adpositional material in (languages like) Afrikaans.

References

Aboh, E. 2010. The P Route. In G. Cinque and L. Rizzi (eds). *Mapping spatial PPs*. New York: Oxford University Press. pp. 225-260.

Biberauer, T., M. van Heukelum and L. Duke. 2017. *'Ja-nee. No, I'm fine':* a short note on YES and NO in South Africa. This volume.

Biggs, A. 2014. *Dissociating Case from theta-roles: a comparative investigation*. Doctoral dissertation. Cambridge: University of Cambridge.

Broekhuis, H. 2013. *Syntax of Dutch adpositions and adpositional phrases.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Caha, P. 2007. *The superset principle*. Master's thesis. Tromsø: University of Tromsø.

Collins, C. 2007. Home sweet home. *MIT Working Papers in Linguistics*, 1: 1-37.

den Dikken, M. 2010. On the functional structure of locative and directional PPs. In G. Cinque and L. Rizzi (eds). *Mapping spatial PPs*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 74-126.

Katz, J. and Postal, P. 1964. *An integrated theory of linguistic descriptions*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Kayne, R. 2004. Here and there. In C. Leclère, É. Laporte, M. Piot and M. Silberztein (eds). *Lexique syntaxe, et lexique-grammaire: papers in Honor of Maurice Gross*. Amsterdam: Benjamins. pp. 253-275.

Kiparsky, P. 1973. 'Elsewhere' in phonology. In S. Anderson and P. Kiparsky (eds). *A festschrift for Morris Halle*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. pp. 93-106.

Koopman, H. 2000. Prepositions, postpositions, circumpositions, and particles: the structure of Dutch PPs. In H.Koopman (ed.). *The syntax of specifiers and heads: collected essays of Hilda J. Koopman*. London: Routledge. pp. 204-260.

Kracht, M. 2002. On the semantics of locatives. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 25(2): 157-232. (http://arxiv.org/abs/cs/0003015.; last accessed 21 November 2017)

Kracht, M. 2008. The fine structrure of spatial expressions. In A. Asbury, J. Dotlačil, B. Gehrke and R. Nouwen (eds). *Syntax and semantics of spatial P*. Amsterdam: Benjamins. pp. 35-62.

Muriungi, P. 2006. Categorizing adpositions in Kîîtharaka. *Nordlyd*, 33(1): 26-48.

Pantcheva, M. 2006. Persian preposition classes. *Nordlyd* 33(1): 1-25. (http://www.ub.uit.no/baser/nordlyd/; last accessed 21 November 2017)

Pantcheva, M. 2008. The place of PLACE in Persian. In J. Dotlačil, B. Gehrke and R. Nouwen (eds). *Syntax and semantics of spatial P*. Amsterdam: Benjamins: 305-331.

Pretorius, E. 2017. *Spelling out P: a unified syntax of Afrikaans adpositions and V-particles*. Doctoral dissertation. Utrecht: University of Utrecht.

Ramchand, G. and P. Svenonius. 2014. Deriving the functional hierarchy. *Language Sciences*, 46: 152-174.

van Riemsdijk, H. 1978. *A case study in syntactic markedness: the binding nature of prepositional phrases*. Lisse: Peter de Ridder Press.

Svenonius, P. 2006a. Axial Parts. Class taught at EALing 2006. The Anatomy of the Category P. (http://www.diffusion.ens.fr/en/index.php?res=cycles&idcycle=304; last accessed 21 November 2017)

Svenonius, P. 2006b. The emergence of Axial Parts. *Nordlyd*, 33(1): 49-77.

Svenonius, P. 2008. Projections of P. In J. Dotlačil, B. Gehrke and R. Nouwen (eds). *Syntax and semantics of spatial P*. Amsterdam: Benjamins: 63-80.

Talmy, L. 1987. Figure and Ground in complex sentences. In J. Greenberg (ed.). *Universals in human languages*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. pp. 625-649.

Talmy, L. 2000. *Toward a cognitive semantics: concept structuring systems*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Wiltschko, M. 2014. *The universal structure of categories*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
.
Zwarts. J. and Y. Winter. 2000. Vector space semantics: a model-theoretic analysis of locative prepositions. *Journal of Logic, Language, and Information,* 9(2): 169-211. (http://www.jstor.org/stable/40180208; last accessed 21 November 2017)