When Lexicalization Meets Grammaticalization:
The Development of ‘wang+path’ Adverbials in Northern Chinese

Christine Lamarre
INALCO-CRLAO

This paper discusses a productive compounding pattern, which combines preposition 住 WANG (wàng or wāng) ‘towards’, with a path-expressing element, either a monosyllabic localizer, e.g. 住裡 wānglǐ ‘in’, or a path verb, e.g. 住回 wānghuì ‘back’ or 住起 wāngqǐ ‘up’. These compounds, like directional complements, express the core path meanings of a spatial motion event (‘up’, ‘down’, ‘in’, ‘out’, ‘across’ etc.), but they appear before the verb, whereas directional complements follow the verb. Only the latter (e.g. 拿進去 nájinqu ‘take in’, 拿回去 náhuíqu ‘take back’ or 拿起來 náqílái ‘take up’) have a bounding effect on the clause. We argue that one important motivation for this lexicalization process is the need for two complete symmetrical sets of path-marking elements which share the same repertory of path meanings, but have different aspectual implications for the clause. The second type of compounds (WANG + directional verb) appears later in history than the first type (WANG + localizer), and fills up the gaps existing in the repertory of core path meanings provided by localizers, e.g. huí ‘back’, qǐ ‘up (source-oriented)’, guò ‘over’ etc.

We also discuss the role of grammaticalization in this evolution, and conclude on a few typological perspectives.

Key words: path of motion, directionals, localizers, Northern Mandarin, lexicalization, grammaticalization

* We develop here some sections of a paper read at the 4th Kentridge roundtable on Chinese Linguistics on grammaticalization and lexicalization (National Singapore University, September 2008). I would like to thank here the organizer of the workshop, Pr. Peng Rui, and several other colleagues for their comments. The topic exactly fitted this volume, considering Pr. Alain Peyraube’s outstanding contributions to the study of both locative constructions and grammaticalization.