

## IX: PLACE EXPRESSIONS AND LOCATION OF THINGS, EVENTS AND ACTION

### 1. Localizers: 里/外；前/后；上/下；中；左/右；东/南/西/北

Single-syllable "localizers" that indicate relative location are "bound" forms in the sense that they alone cannot be used as "free" words, but must be bound with something else - either in front or rear - to form words. When the bound localizer is not referenced to a location or object, it is made into a "free word" by adding a suffix: ~头、~面、~边

bound localizer + 头、边、面=free form

面 and 边 may be "er-ized" in colloquial 北京话, e.g.:

前面儿 qiánmiàn'r      左边儿 zuǒbiān'r

There is one other localizer suffix - 部 - which will be discussed in 1.e. and 2.e.

- a. 里/外、前/后、上/下 can take the two suffixes ~头 and ~面, and there's no difference in meaning between the two suffixes, though there may be regional difference in preference for one or the other.

里头      外头      前面      后面      上面      下面

- b. 左/右 and 东/南/西/北 take the suffix ~边, but not ~头 and ~面:

左边 右边 but not 左头 nor 右面

东边 南边 西边 北边 but not 东头 nor 北面

(北面 can mean "north side" of something with a surface - like a building, but not north of something or the northern part of an area. The applies to all the cardinal directions.)

- c. In addition, 里/外 and 前/后 may also take the suffix ~边, but that's not as common as the suffixes ~头/~面.

里边      外边      前边      后边      (not as common as 里头、外面、前头、后面)

- d. For the bound localizer 中, the equivalent "free" forms are 中间 and 当中.

- e. ~边 vs. ~部 (部 is another localizer suffix)

~部 implies a portion of the reference PW, within the boundaries of the PW. It is used only with 东/南/西/北/中 (and semi-cardinal directions 东北, 西南, etc.)

~边 may refer to an area outside the boundaries of the PW, or a portion of the reference PW, within the boundaries of the PW.

五大湖在美国的北边。      五大湖在美国的北部。  
加拿大在美国的北边。      but not 加拿大在美国的北部。

内蒙古在中国的北边。      内蒙古在中国的北部。  
蒙古在中国的北边。      but not 蒙古在中国的北部。

云南在中国的西南边。      云南在中国的西南部。  
 缅甸在中国的西南边。      but not 缅甸在中国的西南部。

f. 下面 (under) vs. 底下 (under/underneath):

下面 refers to the three-dimensional space underneath the reference place or object (cf. 2).

底下 can refer to either the three-dimensional space underneath or the two-dimensional surface underneath the reference object:

Under the table (e.g. a cat is sleeping there):      桌子下面    or    桌子底下

The underside of the table (the serial number is embossed there): 桌子底下

Under the dish (a note is hidden there):      盘子下面    or    盘子底下

The underside of the dish (the brand is marked there): 盘子底下

Under the eaves (someone standing there because it's raining) 屋檐下面    or    屋檐底下

The underside of the eaves (some pictures are painted there) 屋檐底下

2. Localizer referenced to a location or object (the reference can be a noun, pronoun, or placeword):

a. All "free" localizers (bound localizer + 头/面/边) may be attached to a reference ;

N/PN/PW (的) + free localizer (bound localizer + 头/面/边)

The particle 的 may be inserted between the reference and the free localizer.

With "reference + 左/右/东/南/西/北+边," there is a preference for inserting the particle 的.

With "reference + 里/外/前/后/上/下 + 头/面" and "中间/当中," inserting 的 sounds a bit verbose (罗唆), and breaks the bisyllabic rhythm, so it is not favored.

The particle 的 lends a slightly greater sense of independence between the reference and the localizer.

学校前头      学校的前头      书架上头      书架的上头

b. The bound localizers 里/外/上/下/中 alone (without the suffix 头/面) may also be attached to a reference, the combination of "reference + localizer" is "free":

N/PN/PW + 里/外/上/下/中:    房子里      桌子下      书架上      院子中

The particle 的 may *not* be inserted between the reference and the bound localizer:

not 房子的里	not 桌子的下	not 书架的上
but: 房子里	but: 桌子下	but: 书架上
房子里头	桌子下面	书架上头
房子的里头	桌子的下面	书架的上头

But due to the strong bisyllabic rhythm of the Chinese language, there is a preference for using the "localizer +suffix" form with bisyllabic references and a preference for using the

monosyllabic "bound localizer" with monosyllabic references.

床上 preferred over 床上面      门上 preferred over 门上面  
房子里头 preferred over 房子里

- c. In contrast to the localizers 里/外/上/下/中, the other bound localizers - 前/后/左/右/东/南/西/北 - occur with the suffix 头/面/边, i.e., the suffix 头/面/边 is *normally* not dispensable:

学校前面 / not 学校前      他左边 / not 他左      上海东边 / not 上海东

纽约在东部。 纽约在美国(的)东部。      not 纽约在美国(的)东。

左边的那位是张先生。 李小姐(的)左边的那位是张先生。

not 李小姐左的那位是张先生。

- d. With the localizers 左/右, there is no exception to the above rule. With the localizers 前/后, there's this exception: Due to the strong bisyllabic rhythm of the Chinese language, if the reference is a mono-syllabic word (and there's no bisyllabic synonym), then the "bound localizers" 前/后 without a suffix may be attached to the reference because the combination "reference + localizer" forms two syllables.

床前      床前头      not 床左, but 床左边 or 床的左边  
(the poetic line 床前明月光 by 李白 also helped to solidify the term 床前)

门后      门后头      not 门右, but 门右边 or 门的右边

not 商店前, but 商店前头

not 桌前 (「桌」 has the common synonym 「桌子」), but 桌子前面

- e. With the cardinal directions 东/南/西/北 (bound localizers), a monosyllabic PW may be attached before or after the localizer without adding the suffix to form proper geographic name (e.g. names of some provinces):

河南    河北    山西    山东    湖南    湖北    广东    广西    岭南  
北海    东京    西湖    南昌    北美    东欧

Sometimes a bisyllabic PW has a monosyllabic synonym, in which case the monosyllabic synonym is an abbreviation and has a classical or literary flavor. Names of China's provinces also have monosyllabic equivalents (used on license plates for example), even though many of them are not commonly known. With such monosyllabic references, the "bound localizer" rather than the suffixed "free localizer" is used:

中国东部      中国的东部      华东      not 华东部  
福建南部      福建的南部      闽南/闽南话      not 闽的南部  
长江以南 (cf. 3.)      江南      but not 江以南  
学校外头      校外      but not 校外头

- f. Special meaning of 上: The localizer 上 has some applications aside from indicating

physical location. When attached to certain abstract entities, it is often rendered by "in" rather than "on" in English:

世界上(in the world) 社会上(in society) 课上(in class, vs. 课下/课外)  
but 系里头

道德上说不过去。【道德：morality】(can't pass muster morally)

Other examples: 实际上、理论上、原则上

In referring to location on a printed page, e.g. book/newspaper, Chinese uses 上 whereas English uses "in":

今天在报上看到那条新闻了。 Today (I) read that piece of news in the newspaper.  
书上没有说明。 There's no explanation in the book.

3. 以+localizer: 以外/以内/以上/以下/以东/以南/以西/以北

This form is a bit formal and is often used in the abstract rather than with concrete physical locations.

五十岁以上 三天以上 三天以内 三天以下  
(temporal concepts rather than physical locations)

长城外头 长城以外 (a bit more formal than 长城外头)

英文系外头 (physical location) vs. 英文系以外 (organizational structure)

长江的南边 长江的南边又泛水了。【泛水：to flood】  
(area along the south shore of the Yangtze)

长江以南 not 长江以南又泛水了。(illogical)  
(the entire area south of the Yangtze)

以前 and 以后 refer to temporal locations, not physical locations.

Analogies that don't exist: \*以里 (replaced by 以内)、\*以左、\*以右、\*以中

Some sophisticated examples of the "以+localizer" usage:

如果他不能在两天以内(or 之内)回答这些问题，就没有资格选这门课了。  
【资格：qualification】

这部电影有一些色情镜头，十六岁以下的孩子不许看。  
【色情镜头：pornographic shots】

在美国二十一岁以上才有资格投票。【投票：cast votes】

在古代长城以外就不是中国的领土了。【领土：territory】

「江南」就是长江以南吗？

这座山脉以东是一个大平原。【山脉：mountain range; 大平原：great plains】

In the words 以前、以后、以内、以外, 以 may be replaced by 之; the meaning is unchanged, but the flavor is slightly more literary.

「大红灯笼高高挂」演的是二十世纪之前(or 以前)的社会情况吗?  
("Raise the Red Lanterns"...) )

But note that 之间 ("between") /之中 ("among") do not have counterparts in 以间 and 以中。

父母和孩子之间常常有矛盾，这是自然的。【矛盾：conflict，自然：natural】

君主也利用群臣之间的明争暗斗来巩固自己的地位。(The ruler will also exploit the overt and covert conflicts among the officials to consolidate his position.)

这三十四名学生之中，三分之二是研究生。

老爷子在他的五个妻妾之中没有一个是他特别喜爱的，因为他只不过把她们当作工具而已。(The master doesn't have a favorite among his five wives/concubines, because he merely uses them as tools.)

4. Pitfall: In Chinese, the reference precedes the localizer, the whole precedes the part, and the larger unit precedes the smaller unit (reflecting a perspective from the "distant whole" to the "local partial aspect":

美国中部      山西太原    长江上游      书店前头      李小姐的左边      餐馆外头

The word order in English is just the opposite (reflecting a perspective from the "local partial aspect" to the "distant whole")

Central portion of the U.S. 美国中部; in front of the bookstore 书店前头; to the left of Ms. Li 李小姐的左边; outside of the restaurant 餐馆外头

Therefore it is especially important to *think in Chinese*. If one formulates a sentence in English in one's mind, then translates it into Chinese before saying it, one would have to do some mental flip-flopping, with the risk of landing badly or at least slowing down the communication process.

5. 这儿/那儿 are PW's in their own right, but they can also be suffixed to nouns or pronouns to indicate location, i.e. N/PN + 这儿/那儿 become locational phrases, the N/PN alone cannot be used to indicate locations:

我这儿(not 我的地方)    高先生那儿      书架那儿      张老师那儿  
黑板那儿      请到黑板那儿去。      not 请到黑板去。(黑板 is just a N, not a PW)

这儿/那儿 may also be suffixed to words that are PW's in their own right, and has the effect of emphasizing the location, and indicating the speaker's location relative to the place in question.

留学生宿舍有个餐厅。      留学生宿舍这儿就有个餐厅。  
 她的房间在三号楼。      她的房间在三号楼那儿。  
 银行在校门外头。      银行在校门外头那儿。

6. Statement of location of persons and things: Subj. 在 PW

她在中间。      她在当中。      她在屋子中。      but not 她在中。(中 is a bound form)  
IUP 在清华大学文科楼。      联合国在纽约城里头。  
 美国的一流大学不都在东部。【一流：first rate】  
 纽约的流浪汉多半在地铁站里。【流浪汉：vagabonds; 地铁站：subway station】

7. Place expression as modifier of N, like all noun modifiers, precedes the noun:

(在) place expression 的 + N

听说在美国的养老院都非常贵。  
 请参考……      下面的说明      以下的说明      这段下面的说明【段：paragraph】  
在美国的超级市场和百货商场，服务员对顾客都很客气。  
为什么在电视上和报纸上的广告一定要有漂亮的姑娘呢？  
学校附近的书店生意都很好，不必做什么广告。

Pitfall: In English, the place modifier is always introduced by a preposition, and therefore comes after the noun, e.g. "the book on top of the table," "the restaurant by the school's front gate," "friends on the main-land" One must be on guard to avoid incorrect phrases like: \*书在的桌子上, \*餐馆在的学校前门, \*朋友在的大陆.

8. Existence of things at a certain location: (在)-PW 有……

The key word here is 有, so the negative form is: (在)-PW 没有……  
 有 indicates existence at a place (like "il y a..." in French) and has nothing to do with *possession*:

里头有人。      屋子里没有人。      屋子里头没有人。      but not 里没有人。  
上头没有东西。      桌上有不少东西。      桌子上头没有东西。  
(在)纽约有很多中国餐馆。  
(在)美国有不少骗人的律师，所以律师常常被人骂。【骗人：cheat people; 律师：lawyer】  
(在)亚洲各国也开始有这样的律师了。  
(在)门前有一个推销员，可是我不清楚他要推销什么，你去看看吧。【推销员：salesperson】

9. Location of action: The standard sentence pattern to indicate the location of an action is:

Subj. 在-PW VP

In this pattern, the 在 has the function of a coverb (CV) and the VP (verb phrase) is the main verb.

However, if the action directly affects the location, then the 在…phrase may be placed either before or after the verb:

Subj. VP 在 PW.

In this pattern, the 在 has the function of a postverb (PV). (The difference between coverbs and postverbs will be revisited in Lesson XI.)

Action directly affects location:

请别在书上写字。                      请别写字在书上。  
他连纸都没有，所以那封信是写在一个纸袋上的。  
他连纸都没有，所以那封信是在一个纸袋上写的。  
纽约的流浪汉不都住在地铁站里。  
纽约的流浪汉不都在地铁站里住。(acceptable, though less common than the preceding sentence, because 住 affects the location)

Action doesn't affect location:

今年夏天我在北京学习中文。              not 今年夏天我学习中文在北京。  
他那封信是在地铁站里写的。              not 他那封信是写在地铁站里的。  
纽约的流浪汉不都在地铁站里过夜。not 纽约的流浪汉不都过夜在地铁站里。  
我刚到美国的时候什么身份都没有，只能在餐馆打零工。  
【身份：status；打零工：do odd job】  
not 我刚到美国的时候什么身份都没有，只能打零工在餐馆。  
每年都有几个流浪汉在街头冻死。【冻死：freeze to death】  
每年都有几个流浪汉冻死在街头。  
(postverb usage of 在 is exceptional, in this case to lend literary flavor)

The distinction between the coverbial and postverbial functions of 在 can sometimes be a subtle one, even though *theoretically* the distinction seems clear enough. In general, the postverbial 在 can only be used to indicate the location *to which* the event or activity is acted upon, whereas the coverbial 在 usually indicates the location *at which* an event or activity takes place, but can also be used to indicate the location *to which* the event or activity is acted upon. With verbs like 坐 and 住, the "activity" can be interpreted as being done either *at* or *to* a location. However, 冻死在街头 seems only like an event that occurs *at* a location and not *to* a location, so why is the postverbial 在 acceptable here? This can be rationalized as follows: In literary Chinese, 在 (and its more literary equivalent 于) is located after the verb, and this word order has carried over into modern vernacular Chinese, carrying with it a "poetic" or 书面 flavor when so used.