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POSTPOSITIONS IN THE UZBEK LANGUAGE: STRUCTURE, FUNCTIONS, AND PATHS OF GRAMMATICALIZATION

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Abstract

Function words, including both prepositions and postpositions, though relatively few in number compared to content words, play a crucial role in the organization of utterances. This article examines the specific features of adpositional units in the Uzbek language, focusing on postpositions whose morphological structure is notably complex. The relevance of the study arises from the need for a systematic, comprehensive, and objective description of the composition and structure of the functional-grammatical field of Uzbek postpositions. It also addresses the necessity of identifying regular relationships among postpositional units within this field –their classifications, paradigmatic, syntagmatic, and semantic connections, as well as their functional properties –which together form the foundation of the functional-communicative grammar of Uzbek postpositions.

Keywords: Postpositions, structure, semantics, boundaries, expansion of the class of postpositions, grammaticalization, criteria.

Introduction

The study of function words, which play a significant role in the organization of utterances, occupies a special place in contemporary linguistics. Having vague and fluid boundaries, these classes constitute a kind of continuum due to the ongoing process of grammaticalization – a phenomenon whereby lexical units and constructions begin, in certain contexts, to perform grammatical functions and, once grammaticalized, continue to develop new grammatical roles. (Vinogradova, 2025, p. 3). Among the most common means of this type are

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adpositional units (prepositions and postpositions), which perform similar functions but differ in their position relative to the governed word. In some languages (inflectional and isolating), prepositions predominate; in others (agglutinative), postpositions are more typical; and in certain cases, both types coexist, as in German.

Linguistics has accumulated a substantial body of research devoted to prepositions, postpositions, and related adpositional constructions. The active study of adpositional units as one of the types of function words began in the second half of the 20th century, when the main focus of attention was directed primarily toward their structural features. Examples include the works of such scholars as V. Brondal (1950), É. Benveniste (1974), M. N. Deev (1973), E. T. Cherkasova (1967), V. A. Isengalieva (1959), and F. P. Balaban (1983), as well as studies by G. E. Kreidlin (1979), D. C. Bennett (1983), C. H. Bissel (1971), and T. Kh. Turdiboev (1996). Reports and articles by I. M. Bagryansky (1947), O. S. Akhmanova (1948), E. P. Kalechis (1958), Ch. Fillmore (1966), T. T. Voityuk (1985), L. G. Volkova (1980), and M. J. Cresswell (1978) also contributed to this field, primarily reflecting the structural-semantic and syntactic features of this part of speech.

At the beginning of the new century, with the emergence of a new scientific paradigm in linguistics, research interest shifted toward the study of the functional and cognitive aspects of prepositions. This tendency is evidenced by the works of M. G. Lepnev (2003), A. A. Shirshikova (2021), I. A. Shmykalova (2015), Sh. A. Solikhodzhayeva (2021), and A. B. Pardaev (2005). Their studies demonstrate a wide range of approaches –from cognitive and functional-grammatical to lexicographic and typological –which highlights the universality and multidimensional nature of adpositional research across different languages. In Uzbek linguistics, postpositions have become a subject of discussion in the works of such scholars as A. N. Kononov (1948), T. Kh. Turdiboev (1996), A. B. Pardaev (2005), Sh. U. Erbutayeva (2022), Z. Achilova (2024), D. Jumashov (2025), and others.

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Discussion

Postpositions in the Uzbek language represent a functional part of speech that expresses subordinate relations between an object and a subject, establishing dependent relations of nouns, pronouns, and certain verb forms with other words (most often verbs) within phrases and sentences. Like all function words, postpositions are semantically non-independent; their syntactic role unfolds only within a specific lexical or syntactic context. As markers of grammatical and semantic relations—such as spatial, temporal, causal, and object-subject relations –between the components of a sentence, postpositions in the grammatical system of the Uzbek language have retained their relative independence and are easily subject to substantivization, particularly in the case of functional postpositions.

Like prepositions, postpositions have developed from other lexical and grammatical categories, which largely accounts for their heterogeneity. Some, though not all, postpositions serve as doublets of case affixes.

Marker**da** bo`yamoq – marker **bilan** bo`yamoq (to paint with a marker);

Onam**ga** oldim – onam **uchun** oldim (I bought it for my mother);

Sustkashligid**an** kech qoldi – sustkashligi **sababli** kech qoldi (He was late because of his laziness);

Shaxar**ga** ketdi – shaxar **tomon** ketdi. (He went to the city);

sinfga tarqaldi   –   sinf **bo'ylab** tarqaldi (It spread out throughout the class).

Uzbek postpositions can be classified into four categories according to the form of the noun they govern:

1. Postpositions governing the nominative case: bilan, uchun, sari, sayin, singari, uzra, tufayli. haqida, orqali, bo`yicha. The nominative case is required by postpositions that express instrumental, purposive, causal, and relational meanings. For example: ruchka **bilan** (with a pen,) , yozish **uchun** (for writing), o'tmish **sari**(towards the past), kun **sayin** (day by day), hamma **singari** (like everyone else), osmon **uzra** (over the sky,), duo **haqida** (about prayer), telefon **orqali** (by phone).

2. Postpositions governing the genitive case: ost, ust, ich, ora, bosh, bilan, uchun, kabi... This case is required by postpositions that convey relations of purpose, destination, and comparison. For example: sen(ing) kabi (like you), mashaqqat ostida (under hardship), stulni ustida (on the chair), g'am-tashvish ichida (in the

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midst of worry), gap orasida (in the middle of a conversation), tadbir boshida (at the beginning of an event), sen(ing) bilan (with you), u(ning) uchun (for him/her.).

3.**Postpositions governed by the Dative case:** muvofiq, ko'ra, qaramay, doir, tomon, binoan, qadar, qarata, nisbatan, dovur. These postpositions are semantically associated with spatial and directional relations. For example: qarorga muvofiq (according to the decision), arizasiga ko'ra (according to the application), ogohlantirishimga qaramay (despite my warning), fanga doir (regarding science), uyga tomon (towards the house), sud hukmiga binoan (according to the court's verdict), imtihonga qadar (until the exam), xalqqa qarata (towards the people), menga nisbatan (towards me).

4. Postpositions governing the **Ablative case:** keyin, bo'lak, boshqa, o'zga, tashqari, buyon, oldin, boshlab. The **ablative case** is required by postpositions that, according to their lexical meaning, express the idea of **removal, separation, or comparison**. Depending on the specific meaning of the postposition, this may result in the expression of **spatial** or **temporal relations**. For example: darsdan keyin (after class), sendan bo'lak (apart from you), undan o'zga (besides that), bundan tashqari (besides that), kechadan buyon (since yesterday), uxlashdan oldin (before going to bed), o'tgan oydan boshlab (since last month) .

By their **structural features**, Uzbek postpositions can be classified into the following groups:

1.**Simple (pure) postpositions**

2.**Functional postpositions**

3.**Affix-like postpositions**

Simple (pure) postpositions are forms whose **lexical meaning** becomes apparent **only in combination with other words** (most often nouns or pronouns). For example: kabi, singari, sari, sayin, dovur, keyin, burun, avval, ilgari, bilan, uchun, so`ng, tufayli, sababli, deb. Most of them represent **frozen forms of oblique noun cases** or **specific verbal forms:** bilan = bir +lan, uchun=u+chun, ko`ra= ko`r +a. It is important to note that **simple postpositions are generally monosemous,** with the exception of **bilan** and **uchun,** which exhibit **polysemy.** The postposition bilan is primarily used in the following meanings:

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1.Comitative meaning (denoting accompaniment):

– Xolam bilan keldim – I came with my aunt.

2.Locative meaning (denoting association with a place or time):

– Qishi bilan Moskvaga qatnadim –"I used to travel to Moscow throughout the winter."

3.Manner or state:

– Diqqat bilan tinglang –"Listen carefully."

4.Instrumental meaning (denoting means or agency):

– Xatni ruchka bilan yozdim –"I wrote the letter with a pen."

5.Causal meaning:

– Seni maslahating bilan shu ishga qo'l urdim –"I undertook this work thanks to your advice."

The postposition uchun is primarily used in the following meanings:

1. Causal meaning: – Yaxshi o'qiganim uchun yuqori natija ko'rsatdim –"I achieved a high result because I studied well."

2. Purpose meaning: – Yuqori natija olish uchun yaxshi o'qish kerak –"To achieve a high result, one must study well."

3. Destinative meaning (denoting intended recipient or purpose):

– Bu gullarni siz uchun oldim –"I bought these flowers for you."

Functional postpositions are words that, while performing a grammatical (service) function, retain their original nominal meanings and typically express concrete –most often spatial –relations. Examples include old, ich, ust, tepa, yon, orqa, to'g'ri(da), haq(ida), husus, etc. A.N. Kononov (1948) referred to such units as function words, whereas in the textbook by Sayfullayeva and co-authors (2009), they are termed relative postpositions –elements that are partly lexical words and partly postpositions.

To clarify the postpositional status of these words, let us consider the following examples:

Mening **oldimga** bordi. – He went **to me / to my side**

Sening **oldingga** bordi. – He went **to you / to your side**

 Uning **oldiga** bordi – He went **to him / to his side**

Bizning **oldimizga** bordi. – He went **to us / to our side**

Sizning **oldingizga** bordi. – He went **to you (pl.) / to your side**

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Ularning **oldilariga** bordi. – He went **to them / to their side**

In these examples, the word old(iga), functioning as a postposition, conveys the **relational seme of directionality** and, together with the personal pronoun, performs the **syntactic role of an object**. At the same time, old, as a noun, retains its **morphological categories of possession and case,** which demonstrates its **intermediate status between a full lexical and a grammatical unit.** For example, old+im+ga, oldi+ing+ga. Another distinctive feature of these words is that, within a phrase, they govern **nouns and pronouns:** shkafning **tagida** ("under the wardrobe"), stolning **ustida** ("on the table"), sumkaning **ichida** ("inside the bag"). The **relational seme** expressed by these words in specific combinations, as well as the **unity of their syntactic function** with the governed word, allows us to classify them as **postpositions.** However, when the dependent pronoun is omitted, these words **regain their full lexical meaning** and shift into the category of **nouns.** Compare: Bizning **ichimizda** sotqin bor ("There is a traitor among us") and **Ichimizda** sotqin bor ("A traitor is inside us"). In the first example, ichimizda functions as a **postposition,** whereas in the second, it acts as a **noun.**

Functional postpositions, or words used in a **grammatical function**, differ from **independent lexical words** in that their **degree of semantic autonomy varies**. The inherent meaning of a word functioning as a postposition becomes **specific only in connection with the case form of the noun**. For example: odamlar **orasida** – among people (denoting inclusion within a group), 2 soat **orasida** – between two hours (temporal meaning), uy va maktab **orasida** – between the house and the school (spatial meaning).

Thus, in the Uzbek language, postpositions have not completely lost their **lexical and concrete meanings** and have not yet reached the **high degree of abstract grammaticalization** characteristic of prepositions. In this context, the **tendency toward formal grammaticalization** of Uzbek postpositions becomes particularly evident.

Affix-like postpositions are **morphemes** that appear at the **end of a word** and convey **additional shades of meaning,** such as -dek, -day, -la, -cha, -dayin, -chun, and -gacha. Unlike **case affixes**, which express strictly **grammatical**

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relations, affix-like postpositions convey a **lexico-semantic nuance** such as comparison, similarity, limitation, or purpose.

Examples include:

-day / -dek –"like, similar to": bola-day –"like a child," do'st-dek –"as if a friend";

-cha –"until, up to": pishguncha, uyg'onguncha;

-gacha (often considered already grammaticalized): uygacha –"up to the house," ertalabgacha –"until morning," u paytgacha –"until that time";

-la –in some cases, approximates affixes: do'stla –"with a friend," onamla –"with my mother."

Affix-like postpositions are the result of the incorporation of two words – a postposition and a noun. Consequently, they always have corresponding analytic equivalents:

-la = bilan, (with)

-day / -dek = deng, deb, (like)

-gacha = sari, qadar. (till, untill)

Examples:

Onam bilan bordim – onamla bordim ("I went with my mother");

Oyday go'zal qiz – oy kabi go'zal qiz ("a girl beautiful like the moon");

Kechgacha ishlamoq – kechga qadar ishlamoq ("to work until evening").

It is important to note that in the Uzbek language, the **unambiguity of case affixes**, resulting from its **agglutinative structure**, is compensated by **postpositions**, which enable a greater **variety of syntactic relations** to be expressed by case forms. Consequently, according to the **semantics they convey,** postpositions can be classified as follows:

Spatial postpositions: old, ich, ust, tepa, yon, orqa

Temporal postpositions: (-dan) beri, keyin, -gacha ("until")

Causal and purposive postpositions: sababli, tufayli, uchun, deb

Instrumental postpositions: bilan, orqali

Objective / directional postpositions: haqida, qarshi, tomon

The class of postpositions in the Uzbek language is **rapidly expanding**, with the **development of complex denominal postpositions.** A large number of **derived compound postpositions** have emerged, such as: nisbatan ("in relation to"),

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farqli o'laroq ("in contrast to"), sohasida ("in the field of"), mos ravishda ("in accordance with," "depending on"), bo'yicha ("according to," ishi bo'yicha – "on business"), sifatida ("as," "in the capacity of"), and others.

New **derived postpositions** emerge through the processes of **delexicalization**, that is, the weakening or loss of the **lexical meaning** of full-content words. This raises an important question: how does this process unfold? Based on research into Uzbek postpositions, **three main stages** of the **grammaticalization of content words into postpositions** can be distinguished:

At the **first stage**, a **content word** performs the function of a **function word** only within a specific lexical environment, where the **relational seme** becomes dominant. At this stage, the meanings of postpositions represent various **logical and conceptual types.** The word still retains its **morphological features,** yet its **lexical content** and **syntactic role** bring it closer to postpositional usage. Examples include the words old, ich, ust, tepa, yon, and orqa, which function as postpositions under certain contextual conditions.

At the **second stage**, a noticeable **weakening of the lexical meaning** occurs, accompanied by the **stabilization of the morphological form** of the word. This stage of postpositional grammaticalization is characterized by the **transition of a full-content word into a functionally dependent position,** while still retaining **partial semantic autonomy**. At this point, the word begins to **perform the syntactic role of a postposition**, though it has not yet completely lost its lexical meaning.

The main features of this stage include:

Semantic weakening — the original meaning of the word (for instance, spatial or nominal) gradually becomes **more abstract,** acquiring a **grammatical nuance**, such as expressing relations of **association, cause, or time.**

Positional stabilization – the word begins to be regularly used in a postposition relative to a noun, becoming a structural element of the phrase.

 Formal dependence - a postposition can lose the characteristics of an independent word (stress, possibility of modification), but does not yet completely turn into a purely auxiliary element. Polysemy and contextual variability – at this stage, the word is often used in both its original and new (auxiliary) meanings, creating transitional forms. For example, the postposition haq(ida), which is in the second

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stage of grammaticalization, has abstracted its original meaning—that which corresponds to reality, the truth—over time, and the seme of object relations has become dominant in its semantic structure. Although this postposition retains the category of possession (haq**im**da, haq**ing**da, haq**imiz**da, haq**ingiz**da, haq**i**da), it has lost the ability to be used independently and functions only as part of a phrase. The third stage of postposition grammaticalization represents the final stage of a fully meaningful word's transition to the category of auxiliary linguistic elements. At this level, the original lexical meaning is completely lost, and the unit becomes assigned a purely grammatical function. The main characteristics of this stage are:

Complete delexicalization:
The content word fully loses its connection with the original lexical meaning and is no longer perceived by speakers as an independent lexeme. For example, in Uzbek, the postposition -dek is no longer recognized as a form of the verb demoq ("to say") and functions solely as a marker of comparison ("as, like").

Grammatical abstraction:
The meaning becomes purely relational — expressing spatial, temporal, causal, or purposive relationships between words, rather than denoting concrete objects or actions.
Morphological integration:
The postposition may become morphologically close to affixes, forming transitional elements between syntactic and morphological means of expressing relationships. In some cases, it becomes an affixoid or even a case marker. Examples of such affix-like postpositions in Uzbek include -dek, -day, -la, -cha, -dayin, -chun, -gacha.
Thus, the third stage marks the final phase of grammaticalization, where the postposition evolves into a fully functional grammatical unit expressing abstract syntactic relations, having lost all lexical characteristics.

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Conclusion

The semantic content of Uzbek postpositions lies not in their lexical meaning but in their syntactic and relational behavior within the structure of the sentence. The main diagnostic criteria for determining the postpositional status of a word include:

the degree of semantic abstraction, the presence or absence of morphological category markers, and the syntactic function performed by the postposition. Uzbek postpositions express the relational links in which the dependent nouns or pronouns participate. In the Uzbek language, the tendency toward formal grammaticalization of postpositions is particularly pronounced, reflecting ongoing lexico-grammatical processes that lead to the emergence of affix-like and fully grammatical elements.

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