Spatial adpositions between lexicon and grammar

The paper will revisit the question of the status of spatial adpositions in FDG, which posits a sharp distinction between lexicon and grammar. The ‘fuzziness’ observable in individual languages is regarded as a consequence of variation within the speech community and ongoing changes, in particular grammaticalization processes. After a critical consideration of earlier proposals, the expectation is formulated that certain spatial adpositions will be lexical (i.e. present in the lexicon) while others are grammatical (i.e. introduced at the Morphosyntactic Level (ML)). This will be tested by taking a typological view, examining which patterns are recurrent across languages. One pattern will likely be found to be dominant in the languages of the world, involving a double indication of spatial relations: a grammatical technique used to distinguish gross semantic distinctions and a lexical technique that introduces refinements, namely relations in three-dimensional topological space. Consider the following example from Gungbe (Kwa) (Aboh 2010: 225-226):

(1) Kɔ̀jó zé gò lò dò àkpótín lò mè.  
Kojo take bottle DET in box DET inside  
‘Kojo put the bottle inside the box.’

In (1) the gross semantic distinction expressed by the grammatical item dò is further specified by the lexical unit mè, which indicates the complete inclusion of the bottle in the space defined by the box (àkpótín). Testing will involve a representative sample (50 languages), using criteria prevalent within FDG work (Keizer 2007: 40-41).

In FDG representation, grammatical spatial adpositions will be analysed as expressing at the ML a semantic function present at the Representational Level (RL). Lexical adpositions, by contrast, will involve a lexical property (f) that is drawn from a class of lexical entries marked Ad for lexeme class (see Mackenzie 2001 for this lexeme class). The basic structure allows for a number of variants, the range of which will be explored in the paper, distinguishing those that apply at the RL and at the ML.

The spatial-adpositional construction, lying at the border between grammar and lexicon, is expected to display considerable variation according to the degree of grammaticalization and/or lexicalization it has undergone. It may undergo further grammaticalization with the grammatical adposition reducing to a case affix, disappearing or undergoing univerbation with the lexical adposition. As a result, a lexical adposition may lose its lexical status and become the expression of a semantic function. The question will be addressed at what point the double adposition structure reduces to the simpler structure. There is evidence (cf. Waters 2009 for English) that languages undergo cyclical change in this regard, enriching the potential for expressing spatial nuances by adopting new nouns as lexical adpositions.