Languages in the world may apply different strategies to express spatial meaning. Two prominent means to encode spatial meaning are adpositional phrases and locative case. Some languages, like Marathi in (1), have both systems at their disposal, seemingly expressing the same meaning. In this paper, I look at a sample of these languages and compare the two strategies.

**Marathi** (Pandharaipande 1997)

(1) a. tsor gharā-t s’irlā
   ‘the thief entered the house’

b. tsor gharā-tSyā āt s’irlā
   ‘the thief entered the house’

Jackendoff (1990) decomposes spatial meaning into a directionality and a configuration function, respectively TO and IN in the following example.

(2) \[\text{dir TO} \quad \text{config IN} \quad \text{ground the house}\]

It is not always necessary to specify the configurational part of spatial meaning completely, as this dimension is often retrievable from linguistic context or world knowledge. This can be illustrated with the implicational scale of topological distinctions made with adpositions (Levinson et al. 2003):

(3) \(\text{AT} \succ \text{IN} \succ \text{ON/UNDER} \succ \text{OVER/NEAR} \succ \text{ON-TOP} \succ \ldots\)

As some languages make a very fine grained distinction within their adpositional system, the scale may grow sometimes even up to 30 adpositions. But, for example, Tzeltal has only one adposition ta. In this language, specification of configuration takes place outside the PP via figure properties, dispositional predicates, and/or relational nouns. For example, in principle, it is clear what the spatial relation between a glass and a table is, as glasses normally are standing on a table. Here, one does not really need the information from a specialized preposition (cf. also Sinha and Kuteva (1995) who argue that spatial meaning is distributed over the sentence).

I argue that PPs in languages that have both constructions should be seen as a specification of an, in the locative case construction variant, underspecified configuration dimension. I show that locative case particularly expresses directionality. Depending on the case system, the configuration dimension is completely underspecified or only specified for the more general locative meanings (cf. (3)). If there is need, a postposition can further specify or emphasize the configuration.

This idea of spatial underspecification explains the cross-linguistic recurrent distribution of labor between the adpositional and locative case construction. Also, this idea nicely squares with the difference in frequency and class size between the two constructions: The more frequent or grammatical a construction or morpheme is and the smaller the POS class it belongs to, the less semantically coherent the construction is. Thus, the bigger set of less frequent adpositions takes up the more specific spatial meaning; the smaller set of very frequent locative cases covers the more general meanings.