Jörg Bücker

The circumpositions of German from a typological and contrastive point of view

**Keywords:** Adpositions; Possession; Satellite-framed; Dependent-marking; Sentence bracket; Space

German and other Germanic languages have two classes of circumpositions (cf. Bücker 2022). Denominal N-circumpositions have low type and token frequencies, always take the genitive, never have a spatial meaning and developed from PPs with possessive phrases as complements (cf. German *um* – *willen* in *um Peters willen* ‘for Peter’s sake’ with a former possessive genitive on *Peter*, *willen* as a former possessed noun and *um* as a former preposition). Deadverbial A-circumpositions, on the other hand, form a larger class and can have higher type and token frequencies. Their case assignment is transparently controlled by their left part, they (almost) always have a basic spatial meaning, and historically they trace back to prepositional phrases modifying subsequent verb particles (cf. German *von* – *an* in *von diesem Moment an* ‘from this moment on’ with the dative *diesem Moment* governed by the preposition *von* and *an* as a former verb particle).

This presentation will first focus on how both classes of circumpositions reflect basic typological features of German. On the one hand, it will be shown that the diachronic rise of N-circumpositions is substantially embedded in the dependent-marking architecture of German possessive phrases (cf. Nichols 1986; Helmbrecht 2001; the possessive genitive on dependent possessor nouns was reanalyzed as an adpositional genitive). On the other hand, A-circumpositions arose essentially from the “satellite-framed” and “bracket-forming” architecture of German verbs and verbal phrases (cf. Ronneberger-Sibold; Talmy 1991; Slobin 2004; their heads are taken from the rich domain of syntactically detachable German verb particles as path-expressing “satellites”). After that, the presentation will address some differences between German circumpositions and circumpositions in other Germanic and non-Germanic languages. In particular, the presentation will try to explain from a typological and diachronic point of view why German has noticeably more A-circumpositions than many other Germanic languages (cf. present-day English, for instance, which is largely restricted to *from* – *on*(*wards*), *from* – *down*(*wards*) and *from* – *up*(*wards*)), and why German has no spatial N-circumpositions, while the grammaticalization of spatial N-circumpositions can be observed in some non-Indogermanic languages such as Ewe (cf. Greenberg 1980; Heine/Claudi/Hünnemeyer 1991; Ameka/Essegbey 2006; Wälchli/Zúñiga 2006).

The presentation is based on extensive corpus-based research on spoken and written German circumpositions both from a synchronic and a diachronic point of view. The examples from other Germanic and non-Germanic languages are taken from reference grammars and from corpus-based linguistic studies.

References

Ameka, Felix K./Essegbey, James (2006): Elements of the grammar of space in Ewe. In: Levinson, Stephen C./Wilkins, David (eds.): Grammars of space. Explorations in cognitive diversity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 359–399.

Bücker, Jörg (2022): Die Zirkumpositionen des Deutschen. System, Entstehung und typologische Einordnung. Unveröffentlichte Habilitationsschrift, Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf.

Greenberg, Joseph H. (1980): Circumfixes and typological change. In: Closs Traugott, Elizabeth/Labrum, Rebecca/Shepherd, Susan (eds.): Papers from the 4th International Conference on Historical Linguistics, Stanford, March 26–30 1979. Amsterdam: Benjamins, pp. 233–241.

Heine, Bernd/Claudi, Ulrike/Hünnemeyer, Friederike (1991): Grammaticalization. A conceptual framework. Chicago/London: Chicago University Press.

Helmbrecht, Johannes (2001): Head-marking vs. dependent-marking languages. In: Haspelmath, Martin/König, Ekkehard/Oesterreicher, Wulf/Raible, Wolfgang (eds.): Language typology and language universals. An international handbook. Volume 2. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, pp. 1424–1432.

Nichols, Johanna (1986): Head-marking and dependent-marking grammar. In: Language 62(1), pp. 56–119.

Ronneberger-Sibold, Elke (1991): Funktionale Betrachtungen zu Diskontinuität und Klammerbildung im Deutschen. In: Boretzky, Norbert/Bassarak, Armin (eds.): Sprachwandel und seine Prinzipien. Beiträge zum 8. Bochum-Essener Kolloquium über „Sprachwandel und seine Prinzipien“ vom 19.10. – 21.10.1990 an der Ruhruniversität Bochum. Bochum: Brockmeyer, pp. 206–236.

Slobin, Dan I. (2004): The many ways to search for a frog. Linguistic typology and the expression of motion events. In: Strömqvist, Sven/Verhoeven, Ludo (eds.): Relating events in narrative, volume 2: Typological and contextual perspectives. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, pp. 219–257.

Talmy, Leonard (1991): Path to realization. A typology of event conflation. In: Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society, pp. 480–519.

Wälchli, Bernhard/Zúñiga, Fernando (2006): Source-Goal (in)difference and the typology of motion events in the clause. In: Language Typology and Universals 59(3), pp. 284–303.

# Contact information

**Jörg Bücker**

Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf

[jbuecker@phil.hhu.de](mailto:jbuecker@phil.hhu.de)