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

German and other Germanic languages have two classes of circumpositions. 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* 'for – sake' with a former possessive genitive, *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* 'from – on' with a dative 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 such as *Wille* 'will' 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.

Keywords
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Possession
Satellite-framed
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Sentence bracket
Space

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