

## Constructional family of German complex prepositions

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The paper addresses the formation and the diachronic development of German complex prepositions following the general syntactic pattern [P N P/GEN] (see e.g. Quirk/Mulholland 1964; Seppänen et al. 1994; Lindqvist 1994; Tyler/Evans 2003; Hoffmann 2005). The guiding question is whether these structures can be considered instantiations of the same general constructional schema.

Using data from a recent diachronic period of German (Deutsches Textarchiv [DTA], c. 1600-1900), this corpus investigation traces individual small-scale changes in these complex units. The results suggest that at least two groups should be distinguished on the basis of their syntactic behavior, discourse usage patterns, and semantics.

First, there are complex prepositions of the type *mit Hilfe/mithilfe*, exemplified in (1) – (2) which will be characterized as highly conventionalized and fully specified individual construction types.

- (1) *Die Familie klagte **mit Hilfe** eines Rechtsanwaltes gegen die Ablehnung.* [DWDS, 2018]  
'The family sued against the rejection with the help of a lawyer.'
- (2) *Nur **mithilfe** der Bioinformatik lassen sich die Ergebnisse der modernen Genomforschung [...] sinnvoll nutzen* [DWDS, 2002]  
'Only with the help of bioinformatics, the results of modern genome research can be used meaningfully.'

Second, there are complex prepositions of the type *mit Bezug auf*, which will be characterized as instantiations of the constructional schema [P N P<sub>auf</sub>] with the abstract meaning of reference, see (3) – (4).

- (3) ***Mit Bezug auf** den obenerwähnten außerordentlichen Farbensinn des Persers möchte ich an dieser Stelle eine Frage aufwerfen.* [DWDS, 1913]  
'With reference to the above-mentioned extraordinary color sense of the Persian, I would like to raise a question at this point'
- (4) *Der Bau soll **mit Rücksicht auf** die Finanzlage noch aufgeschoben werden.* [DWDS, 1910]  
'The construction is still to be postponed with consideration for the financial situation.'

From the diachronic perspective, we will show that the first group emerges through the process of conventionalization and fossilization (see e.g. Brinton/Traugott 2005; Lindqvist 1994) of a previously regularly formed syntactic expression. In present-day German, individual constructions of this group follow (most of) the criteria of canonical complex prepositions (cf. Hüning et al. 2020). The process of constructionalization of the general schema [P N P<sub>auf</sub>] involves increase in schematicity and productivity. For instance, the open N-slot can be filled with numerous nouns, e.g., *Beziehung* 'relation', *Bezug* 'reference', *Hinsicht* 'respect', *Rücksicht* 'consideration'. In contrast to the first group, individual constructions of this group show some internal variation and meet only some criteria of canonical complex prepositions.

A constructional family of German complex prepositions is thus quite heterogeneous as it is constituted by constructions of different degrees of schematicity, productivity, and compositionality, which are located at different levels of constructional hierarchy. This heterogeneity begs the question of where to draw the boundary between regular syntactic combinations, complex preposition and primary prepositions.

## References

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