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Composing Aktionsart of German prefix- and particle verbs

German prefix- and particle verbs and the P-elements they contain as constituents are often viewed as idiosyncratic in their formation and their components as highly ambiguous. A careful exploration of such verbs, however, reveals rules of word-formation and corresponding interpretation principles that build word meanings systematically from the meanings of their constituents; moreover, the effect of these principles is often that the constituents they combine mutually disambiguate – one constituent selects one (or small subset) of the different possible meanings of the other constituent, and conversely. I will present a few of the analyses of particle verbs that have thus far resulted from this exploration. These exemplify the general account we are pursuing, in which construction algorithms of logical forms as proposed in Discourse Representation Theory operate on syntactic structures taken from Distributive Morphology.

The focus of the talk will be on ‘prepositional’ particles such as ‘an’, ‘auf’, ‘ein’, ‘durch’, ‘aus’, comparing their functions as part of prepositional phrases, particles and prefixes with respect to the Aktionsart of verbal constructions. Some of the verbs build form these particles show a complex interplay between on the one hand the semantic requirements that are imposed by verbal kernels and the readings of the P-elements on which these requirements are imposed and, on the other hand, between P-elements functioning as particles and P-elements as heads of prepositional phrases.

Of particular interest to this workshop are the aspectual properties of particle verbs. These properties depend crucially on whether a P-element contributes topological relation, path-related or directional information. One important factor is the ‘hidden universal quantification’ induced by P-elements like ‘aus’ in achievements such as *ein Buch auslesen* (to read a book to its end), as opposed to the accomplishment *ein Buch lesen* (to read a book).