

Prefixation: Comparison between German and Polish

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Many studies have shown that the German prefixation, especially with verb particles, tend to be compositional (see (Lechler and Roßdeutscher: 2009); (Springorum: 2011): the meaning of a complex verb can be derived from the semantics of the verb (or the verbal root) and the semantics of the particle. Each of these components can be very ambiguous and at the same time it often comes along with constraints which can bring about the disambiguation of other components with which it cooccurs. My aim is to compare (the German prefixation system with that of Polish) from a formal perspective, using the representations we already have been using to analyse the compositionality of German prefix and particle verbs as a point of departure.

A useful starting point for such a comparative study are German particle verbs formed with the particle *an*. *an* has about 11 different readings (Springorum: 2009); among them: a topological reading, a directional reading, a change of possession reading and a reading with a partitive interpretation. Other German particles are similarly ambiguous.

I conjecture that Polish prefixation is like prefixation in German, compositional and that Polish prefixes are like German prefixes in that they are typically ambiguous. Furthermore, the impact of prefixation on aspect and event structure is something that plays an important role in both languages. The aspectual role of prefixation in Polish and German isn't quite the same: In Polish the prefixes are always connected to aspectual modifications (which is manifest among other things in the central part that prefix verbs play in the well known verbal pairs (or triples or quadruples; see (Młynarczyk)). In German this is not always the case. However, there are still many similarities in the influence of prefixation on event structure.

In the talk I will address the question whether a prefix/particle serves only as an aspect marker or whether it also contributes additional information, such as, for example, spatial information, and I will illustrate this question with some telling examples from the two languages. I will show that knowledge about the possible readings of Polish prefixes is essential to finding the right answers to this question (just as we have found this to be the case for German).

References

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