

The syntax of the Upper German prefix *der-*

The inseparable verbal prefix *der-* (*dr-*, *dar-*, *dor-*, *dir-*), primarily attested in Upper German dialects, is typically known and studied for its remarkable range of semantic functions. On the one hand, it is used to express meanings associated with other non-separable prefixes (e.g., *er-/zer-/ver-*) such as resultativity, inchoativity, negative intensification, and change of state (see example 1). On the other hand, *der-* can also express special meanings that verbal prefixes cannot express in the standard language, most prominently a modal reading. In this function, *der-* indicates the ability to perform the action described by the verbal base form (see example 2). Verbs prefixed with modal *der-* are syntactically transitive (see example 3), but they resist passivisation (see example 4). The inherent transitivity of modal *der-*verbs leads to the insertion of an expletive object *es* 'it' with intransitive base verbs (see example 5). Moreover, in a subset of varieties, primarily southern Bavarian dialects, modal *der-*verbs allow double prefixation with separable and non-separable prefixes (see example 6).

Whereas most existing literature on *der-* focuses on its semantics (cf., among others, Eichinger, 1999; Bauer, 1999; Sonnenhauser, 2009, 2012), hardly any syntactic analyses of the phenomenon have been undertaken. Furthermore, previous syntactic accounts (Zobel & Majdić, 2022) fail to capture the complete set of special structural properties of modal *der-*, highlighting the need for an alternative analysis. Following Zeller's (2001) and Travis's (2010) work, two different structural positions for *der-* will be proposed in this talk, i.e., a lower position for the resultative prefix in ASP(ect), and a higher position for the modal one in E(vent). The proposal is essentially motivated by the hypothesis that the modal prefix diachronically developed via a process of grammaticalization (Roberts & Roussou, 2003), whereby certain resultative *der-*verbs undertook a shift in their distribution, i.e., they were increasingly used in modal contexts (mostly in combination with the modal verb *können* 'can'). These resultative *der-*verbs gradually adopted the modality from the context and finally developed a modal meaning component (cf. Jäger, 2007). In structural terms, this grammaticalization process is interpreted as raising *der-* from the lower position (ASP) into the higher position (E) via three stages, giving rise to three underlying syntactic structures.

The first part of the presentation will focus on the main semantic and syntactic properties of the verbal prefix *der-*, as well as on the variation observed between different dialects in this connection. The central part of the talk will then be dedicated to discussing the syntax of *der-*. First of all, the process of grammaticalization will be outlined and supported by diachronic data (Ahldén, 1953). Second, starting from Zeller's (2001) and Travis's (2010) approaches, the proposed derivation and upward movement of *der-* in the structure will be presented. It will be shown how this movement can capture the inherent transitivity of modal *der-*verbs, as well as account for the variation with respect to the absence or presence of double-prefixations with other non-separable prefixes. For the (im-)possibility of double-prefixations with other separable prefixes, a possible (semantic) explanation will be suggested in this context. Moreover, particular emphasis will be put on the Agree-mechanism proposed for the insertion of the expletive pronoun *es* in the case of intransitive base verbs, and on the possible implication that this proposal may have on the impossibility of modal *der-*verbs to passivize. The last part of the presentation will highlight the points of the proposal which are in need of further investigation, and outline some thoughts on possible cross-linguistic parallels between the syntax of the Upper German prefix *der-* and elements of other varieties, e.g., (varieties of) Mandarin Chinese (Su, 2012).

Examples

- (1) a. **der-kennen** (German **er-kennen**) 'recognize'
 b. **der-fetzn** (German **zer-fetzen**) 'tore into shreds'
- (2) **da-mörkn** (base German **merken**) 'manage to remember (sth)'
- (3) ich der-sehe *(**das Schild**) nicht
 I der-see the sign not
 'I'm not able to see the sign.'
- (4) *die Supp isch nit au-dr-essn wordn
 the soup AUX not up-der-eat been
 *'The soup could not have been eaten up.'
- (5) ich der-gehe es nicht
 I der-walk it not
 'I do not manage to walk.'
- (6) a. **außi-der-ghiahn** (German **hinaus-der-gehen**) 'manage to travel the way out'
 b. **der-fer-kâfn** (German **der-ver-kaufen**) 'be able to sell (sth)'

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