

The context extension of German *um*: a morpheme on the way from a subjunction to an infinitive marker

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In several languages, purposive markers are (or have been) grammaticalised into infinitive markers (Haspelmath 1989). For example, Dutch *om te* was more or less restricted to purpose clauses in Middle Dutch, whereas today it is also frequently used in other clauses (Gerritsen 1990). German is more conservative in this respect: According to contemporary grammars of Standard German, *um zu* (which is the equivalent of Dutch *om te*) is mainly restricted to adverbial clauses of purpose (see, e.g., Hennig 2016: 937).

- (1) *Ich gebe ein Beispiel, um das Phänomen zu illustrieren.*
I give an example for the phenomenon to illustrate.
'I give an example (in order) to illustrate the phenomenon.'

However, it has been predicted that German will become more similar to Dutch in this respect (Haspelmath 1989: 303, Vliegen 2004: 180). In my presentation, I will argue that this development has – to a certain extent – already begun. Based on historical data taken from the reference corpora *DWDS* and *DeReKo*, I will show that *um zu* has gained frequency in certain constructions that cannot be analysed as adverbial clauses of purpose. This applies, for example, to infinitival attributes of nouns such as *Mittel* ('means', 'way'; see (2) vs. (3)).

- (2) *ein gutes Mittel, Ø die Qualität des Weins zu verbessern*
a good way the quality the wine to improve
'a good way to improve the quality of the wine.' (Stettenheim 1902: 15134)
- (3) *ein [...] Mittel, um die Aufmerksamkeit der Passanten zu erzwingen*
a way for the attention the passers-by to enforce
'a way to enforce the attention of passers-by' (*Berliner Tageblatt*, 04 March 1931)

This development can be described as a spread of *um zu* to grammatical contexts that are semantically close to the source construction. Furthermore, in more recent texts there are also first signs of an expansion to semantically different constructions (see (4)).

- (4) *Im Unterschied zu mir haben Sie [...] nie*
In contrast to me have you never
lange gezögert, um auf den Auslöser zu drücken.
long hesitated for on the shutter_button to press.
'Unlike me, you never hesitated long to press the shutter button.' (*SZ*, 14 May 1997)

Accordingly, German and Dutch seem to be on the same path, they are merely at different phases of change. There are still many restrictions on the use of *um* outside adverbial clauses of purpose in German (or rather: statistical dispreferences). These include grammatical and semantic aspects, which I will discuss in my presentation in order to shed light on the mechanisms relevant for the language change phenomenon at hand.

In addition to the corpus-based analysis of the developments in Standard German, I will also briefly discuss examples from non-standard varieties (Riehl 2014: 107, Zimmer 2021: 241, Heine & Kuteva 2005: 60). These are relevant in that there are several examples in these varieties of similar (but more progressive) innovations in the use of *um*, suggesting that German varieties share a predisposition to the grammatical change outlined above. Taken together, my results support the idea that this type of development is quite common cross-linguistically.

References

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