



German Prepositions 101

Jakob Prange
Georgetown University

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For starters...

in

unter

zu

For starters...

in → in

unter → under

zu → to

For starters...

in

→ in

→



unter

→ under

→



zu

→ to

→



For starters...

in

→ in

→



|



(into)

unter

→ under

→



|



zu

→ to

→



Cases: overview

- German has 4 cases:
 - nominative (N), genitive (G), dative (D), accusative (A)
- case markers:
 - often article (the → der, des, dem, den)
 - sometimes also suffix:

das kleine Kind,	des klein en Kindes,	dem klein en Kind/?Kinde
the little child,	of the little child,	to the little child

Cases: syntactic functions

- nominal **subjects** are in **N** case:
[Der **r** Lehrer]/N lacht. (“The teacher is laughing.”)
- nominal adjuncts (\approx **possessives**) are in **G** case:
Die Frau [des **r** Lehrers]/G lacht. (“The teacher’s wife is laughing.”)
- **indirect objects** are in **D** case:
Der Schüler gibt [dem **r** Lehrer]/D den Aufsatz.
(“The student hands the teacher the essay.”)
- **direct objects** are in **A** case:
Das Mädchen hasst [den **r** Lehrer]/A. (“The girl hates the teacher.”)

Cases and prepositions

- each preposition-governed nominal is in either G, D, or A case
- some prepositions govern a fixed case
 - G: statt (“instead of”), während (“during”), wegen (“because of”), innerhalb (“inside of”), ...
 - D: aus (“out of”), bei (“at”), mit (“with”), seit (“since”), zu (“to”), von (“from”, “of”), ...
 - A: für (“for”), durch (“through”), gegen (“against”), ohne (“without”), ...
- function: G is “possessive” case
 - ⇒ can be rephrased with “von” (“of”) + D in some cases:
 - innerhalb Berlins → innerhalb von Berlin
 - statt des Buches → **an**statt von dem Buch
 - wegen des Wetters *[→ wegen von dem Wetter]





Cases and prepositions

- some prepositions can govern multiple cases
 - D or A: an (“at, to”), auf (“on, onto”), hinter (“behind”), in, neben (“next to”), über (“over, about”), unter (“under”), vor (“in front of”), zwischen (“between”)
- ⇒ disambiguation between location (D) and direction (A)

	D	A
in	in dem Auto	in das Auto
unter	unter dem Auto	unter das Auto

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Derived prepositions

- from nouns:
 - Dank → dank + D or G (“thanks to”)
 - auf Grund → aufgrund + G (“on the grounds of, because of”)
 - mit Hilfe → mithilfe + G (“with the help of, using”)
 - ⋮
- from adjectives:
 - ausschließlich + G (“excluding, without”)
 - einschließlich + G (“including”)
 - bezüglich + G (“regarding”)
 - fern + G/D (“far from”)
 - nahe + D, unweit + G (“close to”)
 - ⋮

Contractions

- certain combinations of preposition + article can contract
- dative
 - in + dem → im (“in the”)
 - zu + dem → zum (“to the”)
 - bei + dem → beim (“at the”)
 - ⋮
- accusative
 - in + das → ins (“into the”)
 - an + das → ans (“at the”)
 - für + das → fürs (“for the”)
 - ⋮

Postpositions and circumpositions

- postpositions
 - G + wegen (“because of”)
 - A + entlang (“along”)
- circumpositions
 - um + G + willen (“for X’s sake”)
 - von + G + wegen (“by (means of)”)
 - von + D + an (“from X on”)
 - an + G + statt (“instead of”)
- called “circumpositions” in the standard POS tagset for German [Schiller et al., 1999] (also Wikipedia)
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Further readings

- [Durrell and Brée, 1993] provide detailed mappings between German and English prepositions, including resolution of false friends
- [Müller et al., 2010] and [Müller et al., 2011] propose an annotation schema for German comparable to CARMLS/SNACS

>> Questions??

unless otherwise specified, graphics are from

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[Blogspot: Eins, zwei, Deutsch!, 2012]



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