

The Aspecto-temporal Properties of PP-internal Nominalized Infinitives

In German a number of prepositional phrases can be found in which the preposition selects a definite nominalized infinitive as in (1). As with other embedded constructions containing verbs, like infinitival clauses, gerund constructions, and subordinate clauses, the question arises how the aspectual and temporal properties of the verb in the matrix clause interact with those of the embedded verb. The talk shows how the meaning of the event PPs in (1) comes about in the interplay of the PP meaning, the meaning of the matrix verb, and the syntactic position of the PP.

- (1) *beim Rasieren* / *am Rasieren* / *zum Rasieren*
by-DEF shave-INF / at-DEF shave-INF / to-DEF shave-INF

Prepositional phrases of this sort can – depending on the preposition – occur in three different syntactic positions: i) in predicative position with a copula (2a); ii) as an adverbial with a base position between subject and object (2b); iii) as an adverbial with a base position between object and verb (2c).

- (2) a. *er ist beim Rasieren*
he is by-DEF shave-INF
'he is shaving'
- b. *er hat beim Rasieren eine Geschichte erzählt*
he has by-DEF shave-INF a story told
'he told a story while shaving'
- c. *er hat seinen Bruder beim Rasieren beobachtet*
he has his brother by-DEF shave-INF observed
'he observed his brother while shaving'

Each position is associated with a different interpretation. In predicative position (2a) two of the prepositional phrases (*am*, *beim*) get a progressive-like interpretation. The PP headed by *am* is the one that is furthest grammaticalized. In some regional varieties of German the *am*-construction even allows a PP-external direct object (3a), whereas *beim*-PPs only occur with a PP-internal complement (usually as an incorporated object, marginally as genitive NP) (3b).

- (3) a. *er ist eine Suppe am Kochen* / **beim Kochen*
he is a soup at-DEF cook-INF / by-DEF cook-INF
'he is cooking a soup'

- b. *er ist beim Suppekochen* / *?beim Kochen einer Suppe*
 he is by-DEF soup-cook-INF / by-DEF cook-INF a soup-GEN
 'he is cooking (a) soup'

While the predicative construction has been the subject of previous investigations, the interpretational differences between the cases in (2b) and (2c) have gone unnoticed. Firstly, it should be noted that standard tests for eliciting base positions of adverbials in the German "Mittelfeld" (i.e. between auxiliary and participle) show that *beim Rasieren* has two different base positions as reflected by the word order in (2b,c). These tests involve the behavior of the adverbials wrt. focus projection, fronting of participle+adverb, binding phenomena, associated interrogative pronouns, and others (cf. Maienborn 2001, NLS 9, 191-240). E.g. it is assumed that basic word order in the "Mittelfeld" is revealed if the main stress on the verb adjacent constituent yields wide focus (i.e. yields an appropriate answer to the question *What happened?*). This test shows that in (2b) it is the stressed verb-adjacent object that yields wide focus (cf. 4a, 4b) (external base position of the adverbial) while in (2c) wide focus is achieved by stressing the verb-adjacent adverbial (4c) (internal base position of the adverbial).

- (4) a. *er hat beim Rasieren eine GESCHICHTE erzählt* (wide focus)
 he has by-DEF shave-INF a story told
 b. *er hat eine Geschichte beim RASIEREN erzählt* (narrow focus)
 he has a story by-DEF shave-INF told
 c. *er hat seinem Bruder beim RASIEREN beobachtet* (wide focus)
 he has his brother by-DEF shave-INF observed

This syntactic difference corresponds to a semantic one. In external position (4a,b) the adverbial expresses a particular temporal relationship between the event time of the embedded infinitive and the event time of the matrix verb. This is mainly a relation of inclusion, although I will show how the aspectual properties of the verbs (activity vs. accomplishment) affect the interpretation. In internal position, it is the matrix verb that guides the interpretation of the *beim*-PP. In (4c), *beobachten* lexically implies that the entity observed must be involved in some event and it is this event that is specified by the *beim*-PP. The interpretational differences between external, internal, and predicative event PPs corresponds to similar differences that have been found to hold for locative adverbials in the same positions, thus suggesting that the different access of adverbials to the meaning of the matrix verb is mediated in a general way by syntactic positions.