

mit as a free particle

This talk will be concerned with the grammar and interpretation of *mit* ('with') as a free particle (see Zifonun et al. (1997, G2, ch. 3.2.3.1.), Bücking (2012)). On this use, *mit* is neither a preposition (selecting a dative) nor a verbal particle (bound to the so-called right sentence bracket), as shown by the example in (1).

- (1) Ben bastelt mit an Mias Fahrrad (rum).
 Ben tinkers with with Mia's bike
 'Ben is tinkering with Mia's bike and someone else is doing so too.'

Bücking (2012) suggests an analysis as an additive particle, following the standard analysis for well-known cases such as *auch* ('also / too'). Accordingly, (1) conveys the assertion that Ben is tinkering with Mia's bike and the presupposition that someone else is doing so too. However, this analysis leaves crucial questions unanswered. Most notably, it does not account for clear distributional differences between *auch* and *mit*: the contrast in (2) shows that only *auch* may adjoin the (alleged) focal expression in the prefield. At the same time, both *mit* and *auch* may appear in the prefield with the verbal predication, as shown by (3). However, the effect on the interpretation is different: with *mit*, it is still conveyed that someone else accompanies Ben's tinkering; with *auch*, by contrast, Ben's tinkering is now presupposed to also relate to other people's bike (a reading, which is excluded for *mit*).

- (2) {Auch / *Mit} Ben bastelt an Mias Fahrrad.
 {also / with} Ben tinkers with Mia's bike
 (3) {Auch / Mit} an Mias Fahrrad bastelt Ben.
 {also / with} with Mia's bike tinkers Ben

Further evidence for a distinction follows from the examples in (4)/(5). (4) illustrates that *mit* is fine under negation while *auch* is not. (5) shows that both *auch* and *mit* may be combined, which is at odds with treating them basically on a par.

- (4) Ben bastelt nicht {*auch / mit} an Mias Fahrrad.
 Ben tinkers not {also / with} with Mia's bike
 (5) Auch Ben bastelt mit an Mias Fahrrad.
 also Ben tinkers with with Mia's bike

As an alternative, I will elaborate on treating *mit* as a special kind of modifier to the verbal predication; more specifically, with (1), Ben is *said* to tinker with Mia's bike by virtue of being a part of a set of entities that are tinkering with the bike *together*. This approach predicts *mit* to form a constituent with the right-hand verbal predication, to contribute to negatable assertive content, and to be independent from additionally introducing alternative sets via an additive particle.

As a follow-up challenge, I will explore whether this line of thought can be extended to further puzzling asymmetries. The examples in (6) (each with an interpretation where the subject is the focal expression) and the example in (7) are cases in point. They suggest that *mit* is sensitive to the type of predication in a way *auch* is not.

- (6) a. Das kaputte Fahrrad ist {auch / mit} ein Grund für Mias schlechte Laune.
 the broken bike is {also / with} a reason for Mia's bad mood
 'The broken bike is a reason for Mia's bad mood and there is another reason for it.'
- b. Ben ist {auch / *mit} ein guter Automechaniker.
 Ben is {also / with} a good car mechanic
 'Ben is a good car mechanic and someone else is too.'
- (7) Ben ist mit der beste Automechaniker, den ich kenne.
 Ben is with the best car mechanic that I know
 'Ben belongs to the best car mechanics that I know.'

The contrast between (6a) and (6b) could be traced back to a conceptual distinction between reasons and mechanics. A reason can be construed as part of a set of reasons that are responsible for Mia's mood together; that is, reasons may be partial ones and, thus, allow for being conjoined with each other to a complex reason. This is different for mechanics: while one may be part of a group of good mechanics, this group may not be said to be a good mechanic together; that is, mechanics cannot be partial ones in the relevant sense. However, this argument does not resolve the issue of why the example in (7) with a superlative is fully grammatical. Notably, Bücken (2012) treats the combination of *mit* with a superlative as a separate construction; the talk will address the question of whether a uniform analysis of the free particle *mit* is nevertheless feasible.

References

- Bücken, Jörg (2012). *Mit die schönsten und heitersten Stunden: System und Gebrauch der Partikelvorkommen von mit im gesprochenen Deutsch*. In: *Zeitschrift für Sprachwissenschaft* 31:207–233
- Zifonun, Gisela et al. (1997). *Grammatik der deutschen Sprache. 3 Bde.* Berlin: de Gruyter