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Tenses and Discourse in Old High German and Old Saxon

Within German(ic) diachronic linguistics there are partially conflicting views on historical tense changes, especially on the usage and distribution of periphrastic and non-periphrastic forms in early Germanic languages. Although the ways in which languages encode TIME is one of the most researched linguistic areas, most studies concentrate on the structure of individual utterances. Research which goes beyond this – for example in Discourse Representation Theory (see KAMP/REYLE 1993, ROßDEUTSCHER 2000) – and which is based on valid quantitative data, is an exception (cf. ZEMAN 2010, MACLEOD 2012).

The theoretical background of my study is a theory of tense change resulting from a mutual dependence of discourse patterns and grammaticalized temporal or aspectual markers based upon the methodological framework of ZEMAN 2010 which was used to describe a prototypical tense system of Middle High German beyond morphological classification. The results indicate that there are big differences in the way of construing complex temporal structures between German and other Indo-European languages, such as English (MACLEOD 2012) or French (FLEISCHMAN 1990).

The project will provide an insight into the various strategies to mark temporal relations in the context of different discourse patterns in the oldest documented period in German linguistic history. The study will focus on the following central research question: In what way are tenses and aspectual markers distributed to different discourse patterns in Old High German and Old Saxon?