Temporal Discourse Patterns in Old High German and Old Saxon
Fleißner Fabian
University of Vienna

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 Old English (MACLEOD 2012) or Old French (FLEISCHMANN 1990).

The presentation 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 discussion will focus on the following central research question: Is the development of a tense system determined by discourse strategies a Middle High German innovation or the continuation of inherited (West) Germanic structures from which Old English deviates?

For this purpose, a comprehensive text corpus comprising 6000 selected verses of the Old High German “Evangelienharmonie” as well as 6000 verses of the Old Saxon “Heliand” will be analysed by means of qualitative and quantitative methods in an attempt to establish the initially significant intralinguistic connection between the dimensions of tense and discourse.
References


