

Encoding Future in the Past in Old and Middle High German

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This is a pilot corpus investigation studying the inventory and distribution of forms used to express future in the past (FiP) in Old and Middle High German (OHG, c. 800–1050, MHG, c. 1050–1350). In modern German, FiP is associated with the construction *würde* + infinitive, which is regarded ambiguous between an indicative tense form encoding FiP, and a subjunctive form encoding conditional and other modal meanings (see Thieroff 1992, among others). The diachronic investigation of the expression of FiP is confined to the grammaticalization of this construction from the late MHG period onwards (Smirnova 2006), while less attention was paid to the expression of FiP prior to the emergence of *werden* + infinitive. In some reference grammars, we find indications on this phenomenon, viz. Paul (2007: 291), who mentions a special function of the past subjunctive expressing preterital future ('präteritale Zukunft') in MHG. Crucially, none of the constructions used to encode future meanings during OHG and MHG, such as *soln/wellen* + infinitive, *beginnen* + infinitive or *werden* + present participle, are mentioned as being used in domains pertaining to FiP. To fill this gap, the present study investigates the inventory and distribution of forms occurring in prototypical FiP-contexts in OHG and MHG. The available electronic corpora of OHG and MHG were queried for complement clauses subcategorized by selected prototypical FiP-triggering matrix expressions used in the past, while the embedded clause encodes an event that is interpreted as posterior relative to the matrix event. The types of constructions found in the respective complements clauses are: i. the past subjunctive, ii. a modal verb (*wellen, sculan/soln*) + infinitive, and iii. the *to*-infinitive. A single occurrence of the construction *würde* + infinitive was found as well. This result shows that there is formal variation in the expression of FiP that is comparable to the one known for futures in Germanic in general. It also provides the basis for investigating the factors ruling this variation, incl. the raise and the consolidation of the modern German form. In the pilot sample, we witness the decline of the past subjunctive and the increase of modal-based substitutes. In addition, it can be shown that *wellen* + infinitive is the major form competing with the past subjunctive in expressing FiP before 1350.

References: Paul, H. (2007). *Mittelhochdeutsche Grammatik*. 25th edition. Tübingen: Niemeyer. Smirnova, E. (2006). *Die Entwicklung der Konstruktion würde + Infinitiv im Deutschen*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter. Thieroff, R. (1992). *Das finite Verb im Deutschen. Tempus – Modus – Distanz*. Tübingen: Narr. Corpora: Referenzkorporum Altdeutsch: <https://korpling.org/annis3/ddd/>. Referenzkorporum Mittelhochdeutsch: <https://www.linguistics.rub.de/annis/annis3/REM/>. *Mittelhochdeutsches Wörterbuch / Online Konkordanz*: <http://www.mhdwb-online.de/wb.php>.

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