

The intention of this study is two-fold. On the one hand, it is an attempt to understand the spatial preposition system in Old and Middle Low German by taking into special account functional prepositionalization processes. On the other, it presents a diachronic and synchronic description of the prepositions in this system with regard to the most closely related Germanic languages.

The descriptive model of spatial prepositions which served as a basis for analysis is that developed by Ph. Marcq. A comparison of the spatial preposition systems in Old and Middle Low German is made with the equivalent systems in the Old Low German of the "Heliand" (Ph. Marcq 1976) and in the historically established varieties of High German (Ph. Marcq 1972, Y. Desportes 1984). In addition, spatial prepositions are also compared with their equivalents in Old English and in Old and Middle Dutch. The corpus is composed of texts from three representative periods: Old Low German up to approximately 1100; Middle Low German up to 1350 and Middle Low German around 1500. The texts from the Middle Low German periods were divided into written language groups according to their geographical origin.

Upon carefully considering those spatial elements which appear to have prepositional characteristics and upon considering the principles of prepositionalization and, in a broader sense, those of grammaticalization, it became obvious that the descriptive model required modification. The revised model used here now makes it possible, in contrast to the Marcquian Model, to take the so-called structural ambiguity of spatial adverbial elements into consideration. In other words it can be determined whether these elements participate in adverbial or in verbal phrases of a sentence; moreover, it is also possible to deal with the so-called structural ambivalence of spatial nominal elements which occurs in the course of prepositionalization.

The analyses of the individual spatial elements show that in addition to the single word preposition, one can also differentiate among the following: the double preposition and the postposition, the double postposition, the circumposition, the double position, the adverb and the double adverb. It has also been found that these categories correlate with a number of different prepositional patterns.

Furthermore, the analyses show that the principles of prepositionalization which were observed in the "Heliand", e.g., postpositional elements, are still applicable. Additionally, the analyses point to the fact that the prepositionalization processes in Old and Middle Low German are, for the most part, analogous to those in Old, Middle and Early New High German. Results from this study which differ from the Marcquian "Heliand" analysis, as well as analogous and divergent developments which were observed within the spatial preposition systems of the languages and written language groups are discussed on a lexemic level in each individual case.

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