
Particle verb constructions in historical German and what corpus studies reveal about them

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Particle verb constructions are a challenging topic not only in modern German (modG) but in its historical stages as well. Standard historical dictionaries list compounds consisting of a preposition or an adverbs and a verbal base as lexical items in the vocabulary of the period (*ababizen* ‘to bite up’, *durehbizzzen* ‘bite through’, *ûzspîwan* ‘spit out’ etc.), but it is unclear whether the first constituent has the status of a prefix bound to the verbal base, or rather behaves like a separable particle stranded in main clauses (syntactic separability) or separated from the verb by the infinitive *zu*-morpheme or the past-participle morpheme *ge*- (morphological separability). In addition, it has to be asked if the potential equivalents of the modG separable particles share their syntactic behaviour, among all their ban from scrambling in the middlefield (unless contrastively used) and their occasional possibility to move to the prefield of the clause (see Lüdeling 2001). Searching the recently launched Referenzkorpus Altdeutsch, we discover that there are cases in which the first constituent actually never occurs in distance from the verb (e.g. *ubarfaran* ‘to cross’, *ubarwintan* ‘to overcome’, *duruhbizzan* ‘to bite through’ etc.). In other cases, there is evidence for morphological and syntactic separability, even in translations close to the word order of their original. Also, like in modG, these items may appear in the prefield of the clause, especially if they originate from the class of directional adverbs, but against modG, these elements can also appear in the middlefield of the clause without bearing contrastive interpretation. This implies that the particle verb constructions attested in OHG are not exactly like their modG counterparts, and also that the tag PTKVZ is too broad, covering both separable particles as well as the equivalents of modG non-separable verbal prefixes.

References: • Lüdeling, A. (2001): *On Particle Verbs and Similar Constructions in German*. Stanford
• <https://korpling.org/annis3/ddd/>