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## A clash of methods? Comparing quantitative and qualitative studies of word order flexibility in historical German

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Qualitative and quantitative methods frequently seem to point to different results. This abstract represents an ongoing effort to investigate how the results obtained by the two methods can be brought in accordance with each other on the example of German word order. In its historical dimension, ordering preferences for direct (DO) and indirect objects (IO) have been studied by (Speyer, 2011) with a corpus-based, but **qualitative methodology**. Speyer retrieved corpus samples using a pre-established list of verbs, covering the Early Modern High German (EMHG) and Modern High German (DE) periods, using a philologically sound and balanced sample of texts from different genres. He observed an apparent increase of word order flexibility since the 16<sup>th</sup> c., with earlier samples indicating a higher degree of stability.

We describe results of a **quantitative pilot study** of the same phenomenon. We sampled both Speyer's texts and larger corpora and extended the analysis to Old High German, Old Saxon, Old English and Gothic.

In DE middle field, the DO tends to follow the IO. However, Old English, Old Saxon and Gothic show 40%-50% "non-canonical" DO-IO order, and remaining at high levels until Middle High German. The drop in usage of IO-DO constructions in favor of canonical DO-IO starts in the 14<sup>th</sup> c. and continues till the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Our quantitative, but partially heuristic analysis confirms Speyer's flexibility minimum in the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> c.c. but fails to confirm a significant increase in word order flexibility since then: Though the decrease continues over the 15th-16th c.c., the difference is not statistically significant and we could not confirm that this decrease continued later on. Our poster elaborates on these findings and discusses possible explanations for these apparent deviations.

**References:** • Speyer, A. (2011). Die Freiheit der Mittelfeldabfolge im Deutschen. Ein modernes Phänomen. Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur PBB, 133:14–31.