

The impact of narration – A diachronic view on German

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Starting point and research question. It is commonly assumed that one of the most relevant factors that have an impact on the diachronic development of discourse structure in German is ‘orality’, i.e. that the historical stages of German are characterized by a stronger ‘aggregative’ organization and become more ‘integrative’ within the process of literalisation (e.g. Lötscher 1994: 48; Ágel & Hennig 2006). What is sometimes neglected is the fact that many textual artifacts are narrative texts. This leads to the question how narration has an impact on discourse structure and the development of grammatical means, and what is the relationship between narration and orality in the history of German.

Structure of the talk. To approach these questions, the paper is structured in two parts. The first part provides a theoretical background focusing on the interaction between narration, discourse structure, and grammar. The second part discusses the impact of narration by means of two empirical case studies on tense and left-dislocations.

Argumentation and results. It is argued for a distinction between narrative *texts* that prototypically integrate the viewpoints of different characters and narrators and are thus multiperspectival (Zeman 2020), and narrative *discourse mode*, i.e. narrative segments that can occur *in* (narrative and non-narrative) texts and are characterized by a specific pattern of grammatical use (Smith 2003). It will be shown that both dimensions of narration have an impact on the distribution and grammaticalization of linguistic elements.

- (i) An exemplary analysis of perfect construction shows that the development of the pluperfect runs differently within the two discourse modes ‘narration’ and ‘report’. This suggests that grammaticalization can proceed differently, depending on the discourse mode.
- (ii) An exemplary analysis of left-dislocations, which are traditionally described as part of an “oral” syntax, shows that they are used differently in narrative and non-narrative texts. This suggests that they are not purely ‘oral’ but characteristics of ‘oral narration’.

Discussion. In sum, I will argue that the different levels of narration interact differently with the distribution and development of grammatical elements. Narration has thus a relevant impact and is an important aspect to factor in when describing the diachronic development of discourse structure in German.

References

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