Morphological and Syntactic Change in German Dialects:
Analyses of the Willems Questionnaires

Starting in 1885, Pieter Willems conducted a large, transnational dialect survey using a comprehensive questionnaire consisting of over 15,000 items (Goossens 1989). This survey documented over 300 local dialects in the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Luxemburg, and Germany. The 59 questionnaires from the current Federal Republic of Germany have been ignored in the Germanic tradition (Pheiff forthcoming). Almost all of the questionnaires from the modern Federal Republic stem from an area that Schmidt (2017) calls "(Historical) West German". These questionnaires are of interest since they systematically document large parts of morphological paradigms in addition to containing some sentences for translation and judgement, offering a wealth of information on morphological/syntactic patterns. Further, they provide a basis for short-term diachronic comparison. This second aspect is especially interesting since we have comparable data from both older and younger speakers from linguistic atlases such as the *Dialektatlas Mittleres Westdeutschland* (DMW), allowing for a comparison over 135 years. The questionnaires are not without their drawbacks, however, since they are often incomplete. This talk will discuss this source and its potential drawbacks in addition to pursuing two case studies on diachronic change. The purpose of this talk is to show the potential for morphological and syntactic studies on variation and change in (Historical) West German dialects. This talk consists of two parts: it will first introduce the materials, and then, in the second part, present two case studies on feminine motion and negative concord.

Study I: Feminine motion involves the derivation of a feminine noun from a masculine or neuter base noun. The analysis of the 59 questionnaires from the Federal Republic resulted in 1005 instances of feminine motion. Initial results show that the most frequent suffixes include {sche} (n=355), {in} (n=313) and its phonetically reduced variant {en} (n=116) as well as the lack of any morphological marking (n=111). Even in this relatively small area, we can find geographic differences: {sche} occurs almost exclusively south of the Low Franconian dialect area and {ster} (n=43) occurs exclusively within Low Franconian. Interestingly, almost all towns show a degree of variation, with two or more competing variants. Through a comparison with the DMW for one noun, *Näherin* 'seamstress', we can show the diachronic development of motion suffixes with this lexeme over 135 years. The initial results show three tendencies: stability and vertical convergence towards Standard German in real time.

Study II: It is known that bipartite negation (*en V nicht*) was common well into the Early New High German period in West Central German (Fleischer & Schallert 2011). The questionnaires contain a task asking speakers if this variant with the negation particle *en* occurs in their dialect with sentence negation. An analysis of the questionnaires reveals that this variant was common throughout the Low Franconian and Ripuarian dialect areas well into the end of the 19th century, giving confirming evidence to remarks in dialect grammars (e.g. Münch 1904). This analysis is novel, however, because it makes clear the distribution of *en V nicht* in the West Central German dialects at the end of the 19th century. This variant is distributed throughout the Low Franconian and Ripuarian dialect areas and is concentrated in the west in particular. An analysis of metalinguistic comments shows that this variant was seldom, grammatically restricted to subordinate clauses, and used by older speakers. These factors – in addition to evidence from related studies in the German dialects of the middle of the 20th century (Moser 2021) and related studies on Dutch dialects (Jongen 1972) – allow for the conclusion that the variant disappeared around 1950.

Literatur

Goossens, Jan (1989): Pieter Willems en zijn dialectenquête. In: Taal & Tongval. Honderd Jaar Enquête Willems, 5–15.

Fleischer, Jürg & Oliver Schallert (2011): Historische Syntax des Deutschen. Eine Einführung. Tübingen: Narr.

Jongen, René (1972): Nog eens over de verbreiding van het ontkennende „en" of: welke is de bruikbaarheid van de RNDA? In: De Nieuwe Taalgids, 65, 51–57.

Moser, Ann–Marie (2021): Negationskongruenz in den deutschen Dialekten. Stuttgart: Steiner.

Pheiff, Jeffrey (forthcoming): Historical Dialect Questionnaires and Language Variation and Change: Feminine Motion and Negative Concord in the Willems Questionnaires. In: Sprachwissenschaft.

Schmidt, Jürgen Erich (2017): Vom traditionellen Dialekt zu den modernen deutschen Regio-nalsprachen. In: Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung / Union der deutschen Akade- mien der Wissenschaften (eds.): Vielfalt und Einheit der deutschen Sprache. Zweiter Bericht zur Lage der deutschen Sprache. Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 105–143.