

The Verbal Complex in Subordinate Clauses from Medieval to Modern German

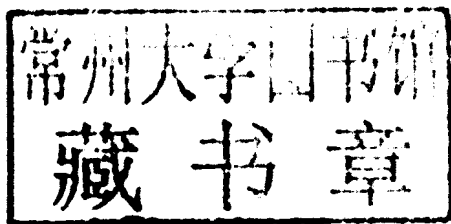
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Introduction

1.1 The verbal complex in modern and older German

A well-known characteristic of Modern Standard German is the asymmetry between main-clause and subordinate-clause word order. In main clauses, the finite verb occupies the second position of the clause (1a–d), and any non-finite verb (1b) or verbal particle (1c) will occur at the end of the clause. If there is more than one non-finite verb, these will occur adjacent to each other at the end of the clause (1d), forming a “verb cluster” or “verbal complex” (VC), in which the verbs appear in a prescribed order relative to each other (1e).¹

- (1) a. Klaus *liest* heute das Buch.
K. reads_{fin} today the book
'Klaus reads the book today.'
- b. Klaus *will* heute das Buch *lesen*.
K. wants_{fin} today the book read_{inf}
'Klaus wants to read the book today.'
- c. Klaus *liest* heute das Buch *durch*.
K. reads_{fin} today the book through
'Klaus reads through the book today.'
- d. Klaus *will* heute das Buch *lesen können*.
K. wants_{fin} today the book read_{inf} can_{inf}
'Klaus wants to be able to read the book today.'
- e. *Klaus *will* heute das Buch *können lesen*.
K. wants_{fin} today the book can_{inf} read_{inf}

1. Throughout this work, parts of the verbal complex will be italicized. In addition, extraposed or intervening constituents will be indicated by bold face.

In subordinate clauses introduced by complementizers, on the other hand, all verbs, finite and non-finite, occur at the end of subordinate clauses (2a).² If the subordinate clause has two or more verbs, these will form a verbal complex. Word order within the VC is fixed, at least when the complex consists of only two verbs. I will call the finite verb 1, and the non-finite verb selected by the finite verb will be labeled 2. (Any dependent verb selected by verb 2 will be labeled 3, and so on.) In Standard German, the only possible order for a two-verb complex in a subordinate clause is 2-1, i.e. the non-finite V followed by the finite V as in (2b).

- (2) a. ... dass Klaus heute das Buch *liest*.
 that K. today the book reads
 ‘... that Klaus is reading the book today.’
- b. ... dass Klaus heute das Buch *lesen will*.
 that K. today the book read₂ wants₁
 ‘... that Klaus wants to read the book today.’
- c. *... dass Klaus heute das Buch *will lesen*.
 that K. today the book wants₁ read₂
 ‘... that Klaus wants to read the book today.’

The word-order asymmetry between main and subordinate clauses goes back to Old High German, the earliest recorded stage of the language: main clauses strongly tend toward V2, while subordinate clauses have later placement of the finite verb (Axel 2007:6). Because verbs in subordinate clauses tend to occur late, earlier stages of German, like the modern language, exhibit verbal complexes. However, medieval varieties of German (like many contemporary continental West Germanic dialects) show considerable variation in word order within the VC. This variability can be illustrated with clusters of two verbs in Early New High German (ENHG), the language of the central and southern German-speaking areas from 1350 to 1650. In addition to the 2-1 order (3a), we find the opposite order 1-2 (3b). Furthermore, some material may occur between the verbs, resulting in an order that we will label 1-x-2 (3c). Finally, independently of verb order, a constituent may be extraposed, i.e. placed to the right of the verbs (3d).

2. Unintroduced subordinate clauses, typically the complements of bridge verbs, display main-clause-like, verb-second word order:

- (i) Ich habe gesagt, Klaus *will* heute das Buch *lesen*.
 I have said K. wants₁ today the book read₂
 ‘I said Klaus wants to read the book today.’

- (3) a. das er in kainer sund *verczweiffeln sol*
 that he in no sin despair₂ shall₁
 'that he shall not despair in any sin' (Pillenreuth 161)
- b. das der mensch alle sein lebttag nicht anders *scholt thun*
 that the person all his life.days nothing else should₁ do₂
 'that man should do nothing else all the days of his life' (Pillenreuth 206)
- c. das der mensche nicht *scholt sein rew sparen ...*
 that the person not should₁ his regret save₂
 'that one should not hold back his repentance ...' (Pillenreuth 212)
- d. Wye man *fragen sol dy krancken*
 how one ask₂ shall₁ the sick
 'how one should ask the sick' (Pillenreuth 166)

Word order variation within the verbal complex is the subject of this study. Although VCs occur in both main and subordinate clauses, this study is limited to subordinate clauses. This is because in main clauses, the finite verb is always in the second position, so that VCs can occur only when there are three or more verbs in the clause, as in (1d). Given that the vast majority of VCs contain only two verbs, especially in older texts, subordinate clauses provide the most fruitful ground for searching for complexes. Moreover, comparing VCs in main and subordinate clauses may be comparing unlike types, since main clauses have complexes of only non-finite verbs, while subordinate-clause verbal complexes usually contain a finite verb.

This study investigates these VCs in the history of German, beginning with medieval German and continuing to some modern varieties of German. For medieval and early modern German, I will attempt to describe as accurately as possible the frequencies of particular word orders, the linguistic factors that favor some orders over others, and the diachronic and dialectal spread of these phenomena. For Modern German, I investigate similar phenomena, both in the standard language and in several dialects, resulting in a more complete understanding of synchronic grammar and diachronic developments.

There are at least two reasons why the changes in the relative order of verbs that occur in the history of German are interesting, not only for philologists of German but also for those interested in language change and syntactic theory. First of all, many changes in word order have been argued to be related to other changes in the language, such as the loss of inflectional morphology. However, the inflectional system of German has remained remarkably stable throughout its attested history. Therefore, the diachronic developments within the German VC present an interesting case, because the change in word order appears to be motivated by factors other than morphological change.

The second reason that this phenomenon is worthy of diachronic treatment is because it has increasingly received synchronic attention. There has been a flurry of research in the last twenty years seeking the best analysis for the 1-2 and 2-1 orders in Dutch and varieties of German (see Chapter 5). Because written Standard Dutch shows variation in the VC, it can be adequately investigated using corpus studies, as in de Sutter et al. (2008). Contemporary dialects of German, on the other hand, are rarely written, thus a large-scale corpus study of variation in the VC is necessarily limited to older stages of the language. Earlier stages of German appear to allow even more variation than most of the modern dialects, thus providing additional data that the synchronic analyses should take into account. Moreover, investigating earlier stages of contemporary varieties may help explain some aspects of these orders that have not been understood.

The rest of this chapter is organized as follows. Section 1.2 presents some previous scholarship on the VC in earlier stages of German. Section 1.3 outlines the organization of the rest of this book.

1.2 Previous scholarship on diachronic German verb order

1.2.1 The sentence-frame analysis

Despite an enormous body of diachronic research on the word order of German, the verbal complex has been relatively neglected. Most scholarship on syntactic change in German has concentrated on two aspects of German word order. First, the verb-second (V2) phenomenon of main clause word order has received substantial diachronic treatment e.g. by Lenerz (1985) and more recently by Axel (2007). Secondly, extraposition (both in main and subordinate clauses) has been a major topic in German grammar, being an object of research in many historical studies of word order in German.

This state of affairs is, I believe, largely a result of the traditional sentence-frame analysis of German word order (e.g. Wöllstein-Leisten et al. 1997:53–54). Under this model, illustrated in Table 1, the verbs in main clauses “frame” the rest of the sentence, with the finite verb forming the so-called “left bracket” and the non-finite verb the “right bracket”. In subordinate clauses, the complementizer forms the “left bracket” and the verb cluster the “right bracket”. The positions before, between, and after the “brackets” are labeled the “pre-field”, “middle field”, and “post-field”, respectively.

Table 1. The sentence-frame analysis of German

	pre-field	L bracket	middle field	R bracket	post-field
main cl.	Klaus	will	heute das Buch	lesen.	
sub. cl.		dass	Klaus heute das Buch	lesen will.	

Modern German strictly limits what kinds of constituents can be extraposed, i.e. found in the post-field. However, as discussed above and illustrated in (3), earlier stages of German are much freer in this respect. Thus much of the scholarship on the history of German word order has focused on the development of the sentence frame, i.e. the decreasing frequency of extraposition. The relative order of the verbs in the VC is often either ignored (because the variation is within the so-called right bracket) or as in Admoni (1990: 156), the 1-2 order is treated as an instance of extraposition (i.e. the non-finite verb is in the post-field). Lenerz (1985: 105) similarly downplays changes in the VC, noting that there is synchronic and diachronic variation but labeling this an example of “stylistic reorderings” that “do not concern the syntactic structures of German as such.”

1.2.2 The verbal complex in MHG and ENHG

1.2.2.1 Behaghel (1932)

For many years, most discussion of Middle High German (MHG) grammar was limited to the poetic texts from the high point of courtly literature. Many earlier grammars such as Paul (e.g. 1966) hardly discuss the position of verbs at all. The exception is Behaghel's *Deutsche Syntax*, which discusses word order in older Germanic prose texts in great detail, from Old English through Old High German to ENHG. This includes a lengthy treatment of verbal complexes in subordinate clauses (1932: 86–118).

Regarding two-verb complexes, Behaghel notes that both orders are possible and claims that the 2-1 order is increasingly preferred under Latin influence (1932: 87). In addition, a rhythmic principle influences verb order: the combination of a stressed word plus a verbal complex with the 1-2 order produces the sequence “Hochton, Unton, Hochton” (‘stressed word, unstressed word, stressed word’), while the combination of a light word and the 2-1 order produces the sequence “Unton, Hochton, Unton” (1932: 87). Finally, Behaghel finds that constructions with infinitives behave differently from those with participles, with the participial construction preferring the 2-1 order (1932: 105).

1.2.2.2 Prell (2001)

Prell (2001) provides a very thorough study of MHG syntax, based primarily on prose rather than courtly poetry. He analyzes word order in main and subordinate clauses from twenty-four MHG prose texts from an early version of the Bochumer MHG corpus.³ Prell's work forms the basis of the thoroughly revised syntax section of Paul's (2007) MHG grammar.

Of the 901 instances of two-verb complexes in subordinate clauses in Prell (2001:83), 28% have the 1-2 order. Prell finds several factors that have an effect on verb order. First, there is an increasing tendency for VCs in the 2-1 order to appear clause-finally: at the beginning of the 12th century, nearly half of the 2-1 complexes have extraposition, while by the 14th less than a quarter do (2001:84). On the other hand, VCs with the 1-2 order continue to occur with a high degree of extraposition throughout the period (2001:84), a trend that is found in several ENHG studies. Secondly, there is a strong effect of syntagm: 39% of modal-infinitive syntagms have the 1-2 order, while 24.7% of perfects and only 16.8% of passives do (2001:85). Thirdly, when the non-finite verb has a stressed separable prefix (SSP), the 1-2 order occurs more frequently than expected: there are 21 instances of the 2-1 order but 22 instances of 1-2 (2001:87).

With respect to complexes of three verbs, Prell (2001:88) finds only 16 instances in subordinate clauses. Of these, 7 are in the 1-3-2 order, 5 are 3-1-2, and 4 are 1-2-3. The majority of these examples involve a modal verb with the passive voice. Prell finds no instances of 3-2-1, the prevalent order in Modern Standard German.

Prell concludes from this data that MHG, like Modern German, is a verb-final language with movement of the finite verb to COMP in main clauses (2001:119). For Prell, the topological fields in the two stages of German are exactly the same, so that the structure for both is as in Table 1 above. The differences are that the post-field is a "strong" position in MHG (i.e. extraposition was frequent) but has weakened in the modern language, while the 2-1 order in the right bracket was "weak" in MHG (i.e. there was variation in the VC) but has become "strong" (2001:119). Prell suspects that these two changes may be related, with the result that Modern German subordinate clauses nearly always end in a finite verb (2001:119).

1.2.2.3 Hammarström (1923)

By Early New High German (ENHG), prose texts range across many dialects and genres, and thanks to an increasingly literate population, there are many texts such as personal letters that may more accurately reflect the speech of the time. Hammarström (1923) looks at verb placement in ENHG in both chancery

3. Although this is the same corpus from which I selected texts for my study (Chapter 2), only five texts were selected by both Prell (2001) and my study: *Notker, Buch der Könige*, *Speculum ecclesiae*, *Schwarzwälder Predigten*, and *Mühlhäuser Reichsrechtsbuch*.

documents and popular literature. The earliest chancery documents, from the first half of the 14th century, have the 1-2 order 12–16% of the time. By the 16th century, this has fallen to 0–1%. The rates of 1-2 are higher for popular literature of the 16th century, ranging from 5–37%. In all time periods and text types, the rate of the 1-2 order is higher for the modal-infinitive construction than for the participial constructions.⁴ Hammarström (1923: 150–162) also looks at subordinate clauses with three verbs, but the number of tokens is quite small. Generally speaking, he finds a preference for the 3-2-1 order in official documents but for 1-3-2 with the IPP construction.

Hammarström's (1923: 199–200) conclusion is that the word order of the chancery documents was influenced by Latin (although he does not explicitly discuss what form that influence took), and the chancery documents, in turn, served as the model for the emerging written standard. However, Hammarström's selection of texts is very uneven, with the chancery documents much older than the literary texts and, as Maurer (1926: 84) points out, not distinguished by dialect.

1.2.2.4 Maurer (1926)

Maurer (1926) places much more emphasis on dialect differences. He investigates a large number of both official documents and literary texts, from different dialect areas from 1300 to 1700. Unlike Hammarström (1923), Maurer looks only at perfect constructions. Although he does not give the results for perfects with *haben* 'have' in tabular form, his results for perfects with *sein* 'be' are repeated in Table 2. Based on these results, he concludes that the Alemannic areas (Switzerland, Alsace, Swabia, and Baden) have the highest rates of 1-2, while East Middle German (EMG) and North Bavarian (i.e. Nuremberg) have the lowest rates.

Table 2. Frequency of 1-2 order with *sein* perfects in Maurer (1926)

Region	Percentage of 1-2 order (1400–1600) ⁵
High Alemannic (Swiss)	30%
Low Alemannic (Swiss)	12%
Alsatian	50% → 33%
Swabian	50% → 60%
S. and M. Bavarian	8%
N. Bavarian (Nuremberg)	3%
Rhine Franconian	10% → 30%
EMG dialect	60% → 20%
EMG written language	5% → 0%

4. See Sapp (2006) for a more detailed discussion.

5. Adapted from Maurer (1926: 148). Maurer's table is more complicated than this, with some variation over time for some dialects.

Maurer (1926: 151) concludes that the EMG and North Bavarian dialects prefer the 2-1 order because they were already under the influence of the written language at this early stage. The tendency to have 2-1 in the written ENHG language, according to Maurer (1926: 123), is a direct result of Latin influence. Maurer (1926: 180) claims that late-medieval Latin school grammars prescribed the 2-1 word order for perfect passives like *quod dictum est* 'which was said', which then provided the model for ENHG word order.⁶ Maurer (1926: 165) finds that verb clusters translated from Latin may vary in word order when the Latin original is a simplex verb (4), but are 2-1 when the original is a cluster with 2-1 order (5).

- (4) a. Latin original: a quo lingua latina nomen accepit
from REL language Latin name receives
b. translation: von deme latinisch tunge ist genannt
from REL Latin tongue is named
'for which the Latin language is named'
- (5) a. Latin original: Qui postea dictus est Sedechias
who afterward said is S.
b. translation: der dar nâ gehêten was Sedechias
who afterward called was S.
'who was later called Sedechias'

Furthermore, in Latin-based texts, Maurer (1926: 164) finds a higher frequency of the 2-1 order with perfects formed with *sein* than with *haben*, supporting his conclusion that the Latin perfect passive (which is formed with the verb *esse* 'to be') played an important role. Finally, in addition to Latin influence, Maurer (1926: 159) attributes a certain role to so-called rhythm: some combinations of verbs prefer specific orders, to maintain an alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables, and verbal prefixes affect the rhythmic structure as well. Maurer (1926: 161–162) also claims that falling intonation favors 2-1 order, so 2-1 is more likely to occur in a sentence-final subordinate clause than in a sentence-initial one.

Besides the problems with Maurer's Latin hypothesis pointed out by Ebert (1981) (discussed in Section 1.2.2.6 below), there are several problems with the way his study is conducted. First of all, it does not look at modal plus infinitive constructions, which Hammarström and later studies show to have a higher rate of 1-2. Secondly, it mixes text types, so it is not clear how much of the variation is due to dialect and how much is due to genre. The EMG data in Table 2 are especially telling in this regard: that dialect shows both the highest and lowest

6. However, Burridge (1993: 115) and Ebert (1998: 116) demonstrate that medieval grammars of German do not make any such prescriptions.

percentages of the 1-2 order, because it is divided into two categories. Thirdly, as Hård (1981: 26) points out, the number of tokens from each text is quite small. It is unclear whether the differences between Hammarström's and Maurer's results are due to the fact that Maurer takes into account texts from various dialects, or due to the problems with his study. Finally, like Hammarström (1923), Maurer (1926) does not give any indication of whether his results are statistically significant.

1.2.2.5 *Hård (1981)*

Hård (1981) is a study of 17,073 clusters of three or more verbs, from 1450 to 1975. We will be concerned here only with his first period (1450–1580), from which he has 2,704 tokens. The details of his study will be discussed and compared to my results in Chapter 3, but here I will summarize his basic findings.

First of all, Hård (1981: 75) finds that, although ENHG has an increasing tendency to have the finite verb at the end of a two-verb cluster (2-1), it has the opposite tendency in three-verb clusters, with an increasing preference for the 1-3-2 order. Secondly, Hård (1981: 54) finds this trend mainly in the High German dialects, with Low German preferring the 3-2-1 order. Finally, after the ENHG period, Hård (1981: 174) demonstrates that the downward trend in the 3-2-1 order reverses for all constructions except the IPP, becoming the norm by the 20th century.

1.2.2.6 *Ebert (1981)*

Ebert (1981) examines a variety of text types written by forty-four people from Nuremberg from the 14th to 16th centuries. By investigating texts from just one city, Ebert is able to pinpoint some of the social and stylistic variables that determine the variation between the 2-1 and 1-2 orders.⁷ He thus avoids Maurer's pitfall of lumping all types of texts together while dodging the problem of dialect differences. Moreover, Ebert uses a sophisticated statistical model (Generalized Linear Interactive Modeling) that controls the variables stress, time, style, class, education, and occupation.

Ebert (1981: 219–228) finds that the following factors have an effect on verb order. The stress of the word preceding the VC turns out to be a significant factor. When the preceding word is a noun (i.e. stressed according to Ebert), there is no clear preference for either order, but when the preceding word is a pronoun (assumed to be unstressed), the 2-1 order is strongly preferred. Time is also a significant variable, with a general decline in the 1-2 order as has been shown in other studies. The results for style are significant as well, with more formal letters having

7. Ebert (1981) treats only VCs where the two verbs are adjacent, thus excluding instances of 1-x-2.

higher rates of 2-1. Combining the factors class, education, and occupation gives the following hierarchy: administrators have the highest rates of 2-1, followed by merchants, artisans, students, nuns, and secular women. The type of syntagm is significant as well: *werden* + participle has the highest rate of 2-1, followed by *haben* + participle, modals/*werden* + infinitive, and finally *sein* + participle.

Ebert considers other “rhythmic” factors, which have been given primary importance since Maurer (1926). First, Ebert (1981:206) disproves Maurer’s contention that sentence-final subordinate clauses show a higher rate of 2-1 and thus that the 2-1 order is linked to falling intonation. Secondly, Ebert (1981:229) confirms Maurer’s findings (1926:159) that verbs with stressed separable prefixes are the least likely to show the 2-1 order. Thirdly, Ebert (1981:208) finds that the alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables in the VC “may affect the choice” of orders, but the number of examples is too small for statistical analysis. Finally, Ebert (1981:209) notices that the placement of the VC within the clause may have an effect on the ordering within the cluster: when the verbs are in clause-final position, the 2-1 order is preferred.

Based on these findings, Ebert concludes that Latin influence on the 2-1 order has been overstated. First of all, the preference for 2-1 is not tied to an individual’s knowledge of Latin: merchants and artisans, who would not have had much schooling in Latin, show a higher rate of 2-1 than students, who received their education in Latin. Secondly, although Maurer claimed that Latin perfect passives like *quod dictum est* ‘which was said’ influenced the German passive *das gesagt ist* ‘which is said’, *sein* + participle is the syntagm which shows the lowest rate of 2-1. Ebert (1981:231) maintains that this “soundly refutes” the Latin hypothesis.⁸ According to Ebert (1981:237), the tendency to show the 2-1 order more and more over time is an example of “change from above”, passed down from the chancery style, rather than an imitation of Latin syntax.⁹

1.2.2.7 Ebert (1998)

Ebert (1998) studies verb placement primarily in the language of teenagers from 16th-century Nuremberg. Ebert (1998:65–67) finds several factors that influence verb order in the writings of these individuals. First, as seen in earlier research,

8. Ebert’s examples of *sein* + participle are all the perfect active use of *sein*; he excludes the *sein* passive (1981:204). Other studies find that the *sein* passive has very high rates of 2-1, see the discussion of Ebert (1998) below and Chapters 2 and 3. This somewhat weakens Ebert’s refutation of Latin hypothesis, since Maurer (1926) would predict high rates of 2-1 with the *sein* passive, not necessarily the *sein* perfect.

9. However, as Burridge (1993:117) points out, this still does not rule out indirect Latin influence, since Latin word order could have influenced chancery style.