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Language research at the crossroads of disciplines

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Quantitative verification of Old English concessive conjunctions

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Recently, there has been the extreme rise of automatic information processing in terms of selection and preservation of language material in the analysis of a large amount of empirical material and creation objective conclusions about different aspects of the corpus of particular texts. Corpus linguistics became of great help in this point for modern linguistic science and historical studies, in particular.

The focus of our study is on the corpus research of the category of concessiveness which is actualized by concessive conjunctions in complex sentences with concessive semantics in the Old English texts such as "Beowulf" and "Alfred's Introduction to Laws" from Helsinki Corpus. For this purpose, there had been used the linguistic corpus tool manager "Voyant Tools".

The rationale of the study is to find out the frequency of usage of the defined Old English concessive conjunctions as *þeah* (though), *hwæþere* (however), *swa þeah* (yet), *swa* (unless), *stille* (still) in Old English texts "Beowulf" and "Alfred's Introduction to Laws" from Helsinki Corpus. This corpus quantitative verification helps understand both concessive conjunctions' frequency of usage in Old English Corpus texts as well as their compatibility with other constituents of the sentences including other connectors.

The findings of our study have presented the following results of concessive conjunctions which introduce concessive clauses: in the text "Alfred's Introduction to Laws" there have been identified only two concessive conjunctions as *þeah* (2) and *swa* (11). In the text "Beowulf" there have been identified all selected concessive conjunctions as *þeah* (20), *hwæþere* (2), *swa þeah* (3), *swa* (191), *stille* (2). And due to the corpus manager "Voyant tools", we have also defined the usage of the studied concessive conjunctions with another constituents of the sentences such as: *stane*, *oððe*, *utgongan*, *stafe*, *ðin*, *ðe*, *to*, *he*, *ne*, *him* (with *þeah*); *ðu*, *he*, *ne*, *hine*, *hlaford*, *wæs*, *ond*, *he*, *þæt* (with *swa*); *sipðan*, *men*, *witig*, *on*, *mærðo* (with *hwæþere*), *þær*, *to*, *sceolde*, *unwrecen*, *æðeling* (with *swa þeah*), *þæt*, *on*, *widfloga*, *sidfæpmed*, *þa* (with *stille*). The amount of usage of the Old English concessive conjunctions with another words in a concessive sentence signals about concessive conjunctions' compatibility and flexibility, and the frequency of usage with other constituents.

Thus, in the presented Old English texts from Helsinki Corpus, we can testify the active usage of concessive conjunctions *þeah* and *swa* and less usage of concessive conjunctions *hwæþere*, *swa þeah*, *stille* which signals about the development of the concessive conjunctions' semantics in terms of the category of concessiveness in this synchronic period.