

The Present Participle with *Wērdēn* and *Wēsen* in Middle Low German: A Corpus-Based Analysis of Structure and Meaning

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A comprehensive description of the combination of the finite auxiliary verbs *wērdēn* ‘become’/ *wēsen* ‘be’ and a present participle in Middle Low German is still a strong desideratum. This study presents a corpus-based analysis of the aforementioned phenomenon with a special focus on its grammatical structure and its different meanings. In particular, it focuses on a wide range of temporal and aspectual meanings, depending on the auxiliary verb, its tense and mood. Moreover, the relationship between the semantics of the main verb and the meaning of the whole construction is investigated. Finally, the competition with alternative verbal complex constructions expressing the same meaning is also explored. The analysis is carried out on the basis of Middle Low German texts from different times, language areas, and genres.

Keywords: Middle Low German, historical linguistics, aspectuality, verbal syntax, corpus linguistics

1. Introduction.

Over the last few years, an increasing interest in the syntax of Middle Low German (MLG) can be observed; yet to date many syntactic aspects and phenomena of MLG have been barely investigated and are only marginally described. There is some research that addresses the MLG verbal syntax. For example, Rösler (1997) and Mähl (2014) examine the position of the finite verb within the sentence; Rösler (1992, 1997), Bieberstedt (2005, 2006), and Barteld et al. (2019) investigate sentence-like infinitive and participle constructions; and Macha (2003) focuses on

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afinite constructions.¹ However, research on the verbal complex construction *wērdēn* ‘become’/*wēsen* ‘be’ + present participle, as in 1, has not been the center of interest and therefore is still a strong desideratum within the field.²

- (1) a. vnde de krude der erden **werst** u etende³
 and the herbs the earth become-2SG.PRS.IND you eat-PRS.PTCP
 ‘and you will eat the herbs of the earth’
 (Lüb. Bibel 1494, 8vb,05; 1. Mose 3,18)

- b. (...) de na my komende **is**
 (...) who after me come-PRS.PTCP be-3SG.PRS.IND

de is uor mi ghemaket
 this is before me made

‘The one who comes after me was made before me’

(Buxteh. Ev., 03,05–06; Jn 1,15)

With regard to the meaning of *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle constructions, the old MLG grammar books suggest that they can express different aspectual meanings, such as durative or inchoative; but the statements on which kind of meaning is assigned to which formal type, namely, the one with *wērdēn* or the one with *wēsen* as the finite verb, vary.⁴ Besides the aspectual meaning, *wērdēn* in present tense + present participle can also convey a temporal meaning, namely, it can refer to a future action. However, more detailed information on the precise

¹ Verb placement is also referred to in studies by Battefeld (2010), Petrova (2012, 2013), Wallmeier (2012, 2015), Dreessen & Ihden (2015), Merten (2018), and Ihden (2020).

² In this paper, *wēsen* is used representatively for the two different word stems meaning ‘to be’ in MLG, namely, *wēsen* and *sîn*.

³ The examples taken from the Reference Corpus Middle Low German/Low Rhenish are shown in the modernized transcription (see Barteld et al. 2017); hyphens are eliminated.

⁴ In this paper, the term *construction* does not imply the theoretical approach of constructional grammar but is used in a more general linguistic meaning.

grammatical forms of *wērdēn* and *wēsen* with a present participle or the connection between these forms and different meanings is lacking in MLG grammar books. In order to shed some light on this area of the MLG syntax, the verbal complex construction *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle is examined in this paper with a focus both on its structure and its meaning, and on a potential correlation between these two. In order to analyze the phenomenon in a rather inductive way and to gain insight into the use of the constructions in MLG texts from different times, language areas, and genres, a corpus-based approach is used.

The structure of this article is as follows: First of all, there is a short overview of the state of knowledge concerning the examined construction in MLG and closely related (historical periods of) languages based on grammar books and research studies (section 2).⁵ Subsequently, the database for the analysis is described (section 3.1). The analysis answers the following main questions: What are the different meanings (especially temporal and aspectual ones) conveyed by the MLG constructions with *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle, and what meaning is assigned to which form, taking into account not only the type of the finite verb but also its tense and mood (sections 3.2 and 3.3)? Besides these main issues, the paper also addresses the relationship between the semantics of the main verb and the aspectual meaning of the whole construction (section 3.4). Moreover, in order to evaluate the use of *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle in MLG correctly, its occurrence in different texts is investigated (section 3.5), and the use of some alternative verbal complex constructions with the same meaning is analyzed (section 3.6). The last section contains a summary of the most important results (section 4).

2. Previous Research on *Wērdēn/Wēsen* + Present Participle.

In this section, I provide an overview of existing research on the *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle construction in MLG and related languages. Since there are no detailed recent studies on *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle in MLG, the most crucial sources of information are the old grammar books of Lübben (1882), Lasch (1914/1974), and Sarauw (1924). Unfortunately, as indicated in section 1, they contain

⁵ I would like to thank Dr. Werner Voigt from Hamburg for helpful hints on the use of the present participle in different Germanic languages.

only meager information on these constructions. Moreover, this information is at times contradictory. For example, according to Lasch (1914/1974:222, paragraph 412, note 3), *wēsen* + present participle can express an inchoative action, as in 2a, or a durative action, as in 2b. In contrast, Sarauw (1924:226–227) and Lübben (1882:92–93) distinguish between the two auxiliaries: While *wēsen* + present participle marks durative actions, *wērdēn* + present participle is used for inchoative actions. In addition, Lübben (1882: 92–93) describes the special meaning of a past tense form of *wērdēn* + present participle, namely, its ability to express the beginning as well as the duration of an action at the same time, as in 2c. Finally, according to Sarauw (1924:226–227), a present tense form of *wērdēn* + present participle can be used to express a future meaning, as in 2d (emphasis and translation are mine).

- (2) a. also de sondach tôkomende was
 when the Sunday come-PRS.PTCP be-3SG.PST.IND
 ‘when Sunday was coming’ (Lasch 1914/1974:222)
- b. se wêren sîner dar bêdende
 they be-3PL.PST.IND his there wait-PRS.PTCP
 ‘They were waiting there for him’ (Lasch 1914/1974:222)
- c. he wart wenende
 he become-3SG.PST.IND cry-PRS.PTCP
 ‘He started crying’ (Lübben 1882:92–93)
- d. dit do, so werst du levende
 this do then become-2SG.PRS.IND you live-PRS.PTCP
 ‘Do this, then you will live’ (Sarauw 1924:226)

These examples show that *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle has a wide range of aspectual as well as temporal meanings in MLG. However, there is no precise and clear description of the connection between each meaning and the use of *wērdēn* versus *wēsen* or the grammatical form of each auxiliary.

In order to gain a more comprehensive insight into the examined phenomenon, this section provides a summary of information on the use of the construction, its development, and its different meanings in other

varieties closely related to MLG. In general, the construction *be* + present participle can be found in all Indo-European languages; in the Germanic languages, it occurs in the older varieties—Old English (OE), Old Saxon (OS), Old High German (OHG), Middle High German (MHG)—and later disappears (Aronstein 1918:5).⁶

In OE, *weorðan* + present participle appears only rarely (Denison 1993:385). The construction with *be* + present participle is used rather infrequently from OE until the early period of Middle English.⁷ However, Denison (1993:380) does observe a higher frequency of *wesan/beon* + present participle in some OE texts; Mustanoja (1960:584) states that the construction occurs more frequently in OE prose than in poetry. From the 14th century onward, *be* + present participle is used more often (Mustanoja 1960:585–586, Denison 1993:380–382). According to Mustanoja (1960:584), in general, the periphrastic construction expresses a durative meaning. Mustanoja (1960:584–585) also shows that sometimes the *wesan/beon* + present participle construction is “preferred to the simple verb form because it has a greater descriptive force, i.e., it makes the narrative more graphic” (Mustanoja 1960:585). Aronstein (1918:10–11) points out that the variation between the *wesan/beon* + present participle construction and simple verbs is observed especially frequently with *verba dicendi*.

In OS, both *wesan* and *werðan* are used with a present participle; however, the information on the potential aspectual meaning is rather vague. Holthausen (1921:182, paragraph 504) points out that both *wesan* and *werðan* + present participle express an ongoing state or action. Clark (1914:12) states that in OS both constructions are used similarly to their counterparts in OHG (see below).

In OHG, *werdan* + present participle appears infrequently; its occurrence increases in MHG (Behaghel 1924:261, paragraph 690). In earlier stages of development, it marked an inchoative action (Rick

⁶ For convenience, when referring to different historical varieties, the present-day form of the verb in the particular language is used; when referring to verbs in different languages, the English equivalent is used.

⁷ See also Nickel 1966 on the origin, occurrence, and function of *wesan/beon* + present participle in OE. Theories on the origin and development of the construction are also discussed by Aronstein (1918:18–29) and Mustanoja (1960:586–589).

1905:28, Winkler 1913:71–78, Paul 1920:126–127, Saltveit 1962:179–180, Betten 1987:111), and later on acquired the future meaning with *werden* in present tense (Behaghel 1924:261, paragraph 690, Harm 2001:289). Kotin (2003:102) shows that the construction used to mark a change from one state to another, which would last for a period of time. He argues that the meaning of the construction resulted from the meaning of its two parts: *werden* conveyed the inchoative aspect and the present participle expressed durativity. However, Clark (1914:23, 25) states that in OHG, in some cases there are no clear semantic or aspectual differences between *werdan* + present participle and the simple verb.

One of the alternative constructions to *werden* in present tense + present participle with a future meaning is *werden* + infinitive (see section 3.6). The origins of this latter construction are widely discussed in research literature (see, among others, Behaghel 1924:262–263, paragraph 690, Saltveit 1957, 1962, Schmid 2000, Kotin 2003:155–163).⁸ Most theories agree that it either derives from the present participle by the phonological change from *-ende* to *-en(n)e* to *-en* (as in MLG *hebbende* > *hebbene* > *hebben* ‘have’) or develops by analogy with other periphrastic constructions, namely, modal verb + infinitive (Ebert 1978:60–61).⁹ While *werden* in past tense + present participle indicating an inchoative action (Clark 1914:30) becomes unusual through time (Paul 1920:148, paragraph 368), *werden* + infinitive is grammaticalized as a future periphrasis in the middle of the 16th century (Oubouzar 1974:85).¹⁰

⁸ Westvik (2000) gives an overview on the different theories.

⁹ Bech (1882) lists examples of the present participle with *werden* and *sein* in the original form ending in *-ende* and with the formally ambiguous ending *-en*. The extrusion of the construction with a modal verb and the infinitive by the one with *werden* is investigated by Bogner (1989) and Harm (2001).

¹⁰ Kleiner (1925) conducts an extensive study on the development of *werden* with a present participle and an infinitive in Alemannic from the 12th to the 15th century. See also work by Saltveit (1962), who analyzes the construction not only diachronically but also synchronically, with a focus on the German dialects. Luther (2013) carries out a corpus-based investigation of all possible future marking constructions in MHG, namely, the simple present, the construction with a modal verb and *werden* + present participle or infinitive. Concerning the variety of the present participle and the infinitive, see also

With respect to the aspectual meaning, Betten (1987:112) distinguishes between the inchoative—that is, punctual—*werden* + present participle and the durative *sein* + present participle. The durative meaning of *sein* + present participle is mentioned, for example, by Rick (1905:21), Winkler (1913:41–54), Paul (1920:72, paragraph 320), and Kotin (2003:163). Winkler (1913:78–80) also provides evidence for a durative meaning of MHG *wërden* + present participle. Additionally, Winkler (1913:54) observes a few occurrences of MHG *sîn* + present participle with an iterative meaning.

Before moving on to the description of the study in section 3, a few words are in order about certain factors that may have affected the use of relevant constructions in various Germanic languages. These factors are taken into account in the analysis of *wërden/wësen* + present participle in MLG. First, several studies point out the influence of the Latin language on the use of *werden/sein* + present participle in translated texts, where Latin grammatical structures could have been transferred to MLG (see, among others, Rick 1905:6, Meyer 1906:7–12, Paul 1920:72, paragraph 320 concerning OHG; Glück 2001:82 regarding OHG and MHG; Holmberg 1916:40–52 with respect to MHG; Fleischer 2007:334–337 concerning OHG and OS; Mustanoja 1960:584, Denison 1993:382 regarding OE). As regards *werden* + infinitive as the successor of *werden* + present participle, Diewald & Habermann (2005:241–247) prove that the influence of the Latin language was crucial for the expansion of the construction in Early New High German.¹¹ With respect to the MLG *Evangelistary of Buxtehude*, Schröder (1992b:11–13) shows two dominant options for translating the Latin predicative participle with a nominative to MLG, namely, the simple present and the *wësen* + present participle construction. The role of the original also needs to be considered when analyzing MLG texts influenced by High German varieties, as Clark (1914:16) shows for the use of *wësen* + present participle in *Reinke de Vos*.

Second, Betten (1987:113) suggests that in the 15th century, the use of *werden* + present participle depended on the different writing

Demske (2019:31–34) focusing on the construction with a finite verb of New High German *gehen* ‘go’.

¹¹ See also Guericke 1915 for an analysis of the relation between participles in Latin and OHG texts.

competences of the authors and on their style of writing. There is also evidence for various language-internal factors, such as the kind of verb used in the present participle. For example, according to Betten (1987:111), in the *Prose Tristan* the use of the inchoative *werden* + present participle is restricted to verbs of emotion, such as *wainen* ‘cry’ and *klagen* ‘lament’. At the same time, according to Winkler (1913:58), the durative *sein* + present participle was particularly common with verbs of psychological state, such as *wünschen* ‘wish’ or *klagen* ‘lament’. As the two verb categories show an overlap, the same verbs appear with *werden* in Betten 1987 and with *sein* in Winkler 1913 and, accordingly, are assigned either an inchoative or a durative meaning, which creates a contradiction. Furthermore, Behaghel (1924:265, paragraph 694) points out that *werden* + present participle with a future meaning is not used in clauses whose function it is to refer to future events, such as conditionals or temporal clauses with the subordinating conjunction *ehe* ‘before’.

3. Corpus Study of *Wērdēn/Wēsen* + Present Participle.

3.1. Database for the Analysis.

An inductive approach to the MLG grammar as aspired to in this study is possible due to digital corpora such as the Reference Corpus Middle Low German/Low Rhenish (ReN). The ReN is structured using the parameters *language area*, *time*, and *genre* (Barteld et al. 2017, Peters 2017); it is also rather large compared to other historical corpora, containing about 2.3 million tokens, about 1.4 million of which are grammatically annotated with respect to part of speech, inflectional morphology, and lemma.¹² In ANNIS (Krause & Zeldes 2016), the ReN is divided into two subcorpora—*ren-anno* that contains all grammatically annotated texts and *ren-trans* that contains all the texts that are transcribed but not annotated. For this study, I used the annotated data from *ren-anno* to identify all occurrences of *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle in that subcorpus.¹³ In

¹² This refers to the version ReN 1.0 this study is based on, see ReN-Team 2019.

¹³ As explained in section 2, in MLG, there is a formal syncretism of the present participle and the infinitive: The former lost the ending *-de*, which led to ambiguous forms. Within the empirical part of this study, these ambiguous cases are disregarded, and only those cases where there is unequivocal evidence for a present participle are considered. See, for example, the study by Saltveit (1957:214), who demonstrates that in the construction with *werden* in the older

order to gather the maximum number of occurrences, I used the main query *pos*="VVPS" and eliminated all false positives from the hit list where the present participle was not combined with *wērdēn* or *wēsen*.

Due to the formal and functional overlap between the infinitive and the present participle in MLG, the present participle may have also been annotated with the tag *VVINFL* or similar tags for a verb. Therefore, I also searched for tokens ending in *-ende* or the assimilated form *-enne* not annotated as *VVPS* using the query *tok_anno*="/.+(ende|enne|ene)/_=_*pos*!="VVPS". I checked all hits annotated as a verb and added the true positives to my data list. During the search, cases in the ReN were detected randomly, with the main verb having the tag *ADJS* for *pos* and the tag *VVPS* for *posLemma*.¹⁴ Therefore I performed another search for these occurrences using the query *pos*="/ADJ(S|D)/_=_*posLemma*="VVPS", so that the true positives could be added to the list.¹⁵

As the next step, I went over the data eliminating false positives and adding further annotation concerning the finite verb (*wērdēn* or *wēsen*), its tense and mood, the verb class of the main verb according to Vendler's (1967) classification—that is, an activity, a state, an accomplishment or an achievement—and the aspectual meaning (inchoative, durative, etc.).¹⁶ I also added supplementary notes, for

German varieties, a clear distinction between an infinitive and a participle ending in *-en* is not possible.

¹⁴ In cases where a word changes its word class—for example, when the present participle of a verb is used as an attributive adjective, as in *in thokomender tyd* 'in the upcoming time', *posLemma* contains the word class of the base (here: *VVPS*) and *pos* the word class of the word in the concrete syntactic context (here: *ADJA*).

¹⁵ The different part of speech annotations of the present participle verb in constructions with *wērdēn* and *wēsen* in the ReN reflect the formal and functional overlap between the participle and the infinitive in these contexts. In order to gain a more consistent annotation, these cases will be checked before publishing a new version of the corpus.

¹⁶ Vendler (1967:97–107) differentiates between activities, states, accomplishments, and achievements. Activities, such as *run*, express dynamic actions, while states, such as *love*, as their name suggests, refer to states, which are not dynamic; both activities and states can go on for a period of time and do not have an end point. Accomplishments and achievements, in contrast, express

example, on the grammatical context. The resulting database contained 410 occurrences of *wērdēn* + present participle and 238 occurrences of *wēsen* + present participle. These were then examined with respect to their grammatical structure and the range of available meanings. The following sections present the results on this analysis.

3.2. *Wērdēn* + *Present Participle*.

The auxiliary *wērdēn* + present participle is used in 41 texts covering all language areas (North Low Saxon, the language of Lübeck, East Elbian, Baltic Low German, Westphalian, Eastphalian, Elbe Eastphalian, and South Markish), a time period from the second half of the 13th century till the second half of the 16th century, and nearly all genres (except for inscriptions, which is only very marginally presented in the ReN): administration, law, deeds, transfer of knowledge (for example, chronicles, medical handbooks, etc.), clerical writing/religion, literature, and private writing and correspondence (the names of the genres are given as they appear in the ReN). Table 4 in [Appendix](#) shows the number of occurrences for different grammatical forms of the finite verbs *wērdēn* and *wēsen*, for all texts.

With regard to the grammatical structure of *wērdēn* + present participle, most of the 410 instances contain the auxiliary verb *wērdēn* in the present indicative (346), as in 3a, with only one occurrence in the imperative, as in 3d. Moreover, the corpus data contain 32 occurrences of the past indicative, as in 3b, and 16 occurrences of the subjunctive, as in 3c. In addition to these two-part verbal complexes, there are also 11 instances of a three-part construction with the finite verb *schōlen* ‘shall’ or *können* ‘can’, as in 3e, and 4 instances with the finite verb *wēsen*, as in 3f.

- (3) a. distel vnde dorne **wert** see dy
 thistle and thorn become-3SG.PRS.IND she you
- bloyende vnde de krude der erden
 bloom-PRS.PTCP and the herbs the earth

actions with an end point; accomplishments, such as *draw a circle*, refer to events that go on for a period of time, while achievements, such as *reach the top*, describe events that place in one specific moment.

werst u etende
 become-2SG.PRS.IND you eat-PRS.PTCP

‘Thistles and thorns will bloom for you and you will eat the herbs of the earth.’ (Lüb. Bibel 1494, 8vb,04–05; 1. Mose 3,18)

b. Do dat gemeyne volk dat horde/
 when the common people that heard/

Des **worden** se ropende
 then become-3PL.PST.IND they shout-PRS.PTCP

vnd schryende
 and scream-PRS.PTCP

‘After the common people heard that, they started to shout and scream.’ (Lüb. HistB. L, 10ra,26–29; 1. Samuel 11,4)

c. Jtem were t saeke dat Jenich meister
 moreover be-3SG.PST.SBJV it case that any foreman

wurde tosettende (...) Enen vndutschen (...)
 become-3SG.PST.SBJV hire-PRS.PTCP (...) a un-German (...)

‘And if any foreman would hire (...) an un-German (...)’
 (Reval Schragen 1401–1450, 4r,01–02)

d. (...) dat **werde** mi nicht buwende van houwen
 (...) that become-SG.IMP me not build-PRS.PTCP of hewn
 stenen
 stones

‘(...) don’t build it of hewn stones.’
 (Lüb. Bibel 1494, 40vb,24–25; 2. Mose 20,25)

e. Gy **scholen** mi makende **werden** een
 you shall-2PL.PRS.IND me make-PRS.PTCP become-INF a

altare van erden .¶ dar vppe me dat offer berne
 altar of earth .¶ there upon one the offering burn

‘You shall make an altar of earth for me where you burn your offerings.’ (Lüb. Bibel 1494, 40vb,18 9–19; 2. Mose 20,24)

- f. Do vragenden ene anderwerue de pharisei wo he
then asked him again the Pharisee how he

sende **were** **worden**
see-PRS.PTCP be-3SG.PST.SBJV become-PST.PTCP

‘Then the Pharisees asked him again how he had got his sight
back’
(Buxteh. Ev., 76,15–17; Jn 9,15)

In the following, the different temporal and aspectual interpretations of *wērdēn* + present participle in the corpus data are examined in detail. Table 1 shows the range of meanings for different grammatical forms of the auxiliary.¹⁷ Since the Bible translations in the corpus are influenced by the text of the Latin Vulgate, cases where a Latin future form or a participle is translated are listed in separate lines.¹⁸

¹⁷ In table 1, the following abbreviations are used: Prs. ind.=Present indicative, Prs. sbjv.=Present subjunctive, Pst. ind.=Past indicative, Pst. sbjv.=Past subjunctive, Imp=Imperative, fin=finite, prs. ptcp.=present participle.

¹⁸ Most of the biblical texts examined in this analysis are translations from the Latin Vulgate. According to Eichenberger & Wendland (1977:66, 120, 144), *the Bible of Köln* (Kölner Bibel Ku 1478,79) is a translation of the Vulgate and is itself the basis for *the Bible of Lübeck* (Lüb. Bibel 1494); *the Bible of Halberstadt* (Halberst. Bibel 1522) has different sources, namely, the Latin Vulgate and the MLG Bibles of Köln and Lübeck. The basis of the *Evangelistary of Buxtehude* is an unknown MLG translation of the Latin Vulgate (Schröder 1992a:50–51). For each occurrence of the participle construction in these four translations it was verified whether it rendered a future form or a participle in the Latin Vulgate. In contrast to these four biblical texts, the *Lübecker Historienbibel* (Lüb. HistB. L) is based on a Dutch version of the text (Andersson-Schmitt 1995:X) and therefore was not compared to the Latin Vulgate original within the analysis.

	Prs. ind.	Pst. ind.	Pst. sbjv.	Imp.	<i>schōlen/kūnnen</i> (fin.) + <i>wērdēn</i> + prs. ptcp.	<i>wēsen</i> (fin.) + <i>wērdēn</i> + prs. ptcp.
present	3					
present (translation from Latin)	2					
past		4				
future	239					3
future (translation from Latin)	96			1		7
durative		1				
inchoative		21				
inchoative (translation from Latin)		3				
conditional/unreal			14			
conditional/unreal (translation from Latin)			2			
ambiguous: adjectival/verbal	1	3				1 4
ambiguous: future/present/ inchoative	2					
ambiguous: future/present/ inchoative (translation from Latin)	3					
Total	346	32	16	1	11	4

Table 1. Meanings of *wērdēn* + present participle.

Regarding *wērdēn* in the present indicative, as in 3a, in the majority of these cases the construction has a future meaning. It derives from the original lexical meaning of *wērdēn* ‘become’, which conveys the change from one state or action to another. As already indicated above, when analyzing language data from an MLG biblical text, one has to be aware of the important role the original plays and therefore always compare the MLG translation with the original text. In case of 3a, this comparison

shows that in the Latin Vulgate, of which the Bible of Lübeck is a translation, future forms are used as well: *spinas et tribulos germinabit tibi et comedes herbas terrae* ‘thorns and thistles will sprout for you, and you will eat the herbs of the field’ (*germinabit* ‘will sprout’, *comedes* ‘you will eat’).¹⁹ However, Latin Vulgate future forms do not necessarily need to be translated using *wērdēn* + present participle, since MLG has other options for expressing future actions. I concentrate on this issue in section 3.6.

In general, the analyzed data confirm the observation in the research literature that the combination of *wērdēn* in the present indicative and a present participle marks a future action. There are only a few exceptions where the construction has no future meaning or is ambiguous with regard to tense and aspect. For example, the sentence in 4, where *werdet kyuende* is used after the verb *komet* ‘come’ in the present indicative, describes two hypothetical actions taking place one after the other. In this sentence, the participle construction seems to indicate the beginning of an action that is supposed to go on for a longer time (*werdet kyuende* ‘begin to fight’). However, it could also be used in order to temporally distinguish the second action (*kyven* ‘fight’) from the first one (*komet* ‘come’), as they take place not at the same time, but one after the other. In the data, there are several occurrences of *wērdēn* + present participle in sentences that convey a specific temporal relation between two distinct actions, such as conditional constructions.

- (4) Sunder **komet** se in in vrunschop tohope sunder vorsate
 but come they in in friendship together without intention
 in des bunden houē vnd **werdet** darna
 in the landlord yard and become-3PL.PRS.IND afterwards
kyuende dat en is nen herwerkij edder husfrede
 fight-PRS.PTCP that not is no act of violence or trespass

¹⁹ The Vulgate text is from the online reference of *Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft* (the German Bible Society), available at <https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/online-bibeln/biblia-sacra-vulgata/lesen-im-bibeltext/>, accessed on October 19, 2021. In regard to the *Bible of Halberstadt* (Halberst. Bibel 1522), Clark (1914:17) also shows that *wērdēn* + present participle is frequently used for translating a Latin future form.

‘And when they come together as friends without bad intentions to the yard of the landlord and afterwards begin to fight, that is neither an act of violence nor a trespass.’ (Lüb. Jüt. LB 1485, 30v,12–15)

A future meaning is also conveyed by sentences with *wērdēn* in the imperative, as in 3d, and by three-part verbal complexes with the finite verb *schōlen* (or *künnen*) in the present indicative, as in 3e. These examples again show the influence of the Latin original on the translated biblical text, since the Vulgate uses future forms (*aedificabis* ‘you will build’, *facietis* ‘you will make’). The construction *scholen makende werden* ‘shall make’ in 3e seems like a fusion of two options for expressing future in MLG (*wērdēn* + present participle and *schōlen* + infinitive), and thus represents a third alternative.

In the majority of sentences with *wērdēn* in the past indicative, the beginning of a new action is expressed, as in *worden se ropende vnd schryende* ‘they started to shout and scream’ in 3b. Thus, the inchoative aspectual meaning observed in other historical varieties (see section 2) can be confirmed in MLG as well. Strikingly, in the Vulgate original of 3b the two verbs are used in the perfective tense (*levavit* ‘has raised [its voice]’; *flevit* ‘it has cried’). Apart from this example, there are a few more instances where *wērdēn* in the past indicative + present participle follows a temporal clause, as in 5a, or is part of such a clause itself, as in 5b.²⁰ In contexts like these, the participle may be used to indicate a strong temporal connection between two actions, namely, that one takes place immediately after the other (for example, wake up > look up).

(5) a. Do he entwakede . vnde dachte yd were
when he woke up . and thought it be-3SG.PST.SBJV

bedrechnisse myt des **wart**
illusion with that become-3SG.PST.IND

he wedder entslapende
he again fall+asleep-PRS.PTCP

‘After he woke up and thought it might be an illusion, he fell asleep again.’ (Lüb. Birg. Openb. 1496, 34v,12–13)

²⁰ For the durative *sîn* ‘be’ + present participle in MHG Winkler (1913:59) also observes a frequent use of temporal clauses with *dô* ‘when’.

- b. Do he vntwakende wart
 when he wake+up-PRS.PTCP become-3SG.PST.IND

He sach up vnde wart vorwart
 he looked up and became frightened

‘After he woke up, he looked up and got frightened.’

(Val. u. Nam. Stockh. Hs., 10r,06–07)

The examples in 5 reveal another important point concerning *wērdēn* in the past indicative + present participle. If it was only used for expressing the beginning of an action, its use would be limited to durative events; this construction would not be used with achievements as they are incompatible with an inchoative reading. Yet the data contain examples of achievement verbs such as *entslāpen* ‘fall asleep’ in 5a and *entwāken* ‘wake up’ in 5b. However, in these examples, the construction does not convey an inchoative meaning but rather a simple past meaning; therefore, these occurrences are listed under “past” in table 1. This interpretation is supported by the fact that in the MLG dictionary by Lasch et al. (1956ff., vol. 1, column 569), the combination *entslāpen(de) wērdēn* is listed and translated without any aspectual meaning. It is possible that by that point, *wērdēn* + *entslāpen* had already become lexicalized, and so now *wērdēn* could be used with other achievements, such as *entwāken*.

Similar to *wērdēn* in the past indicative + present participle, the three-part verbal complex with the finite verb *wēsen* could also express inchoative aspect, as in *sende were worden* ‘started to see’ in 3f. However, strikingly, all such cases in the corpus come from the *Evangelistary of Buxtehude* and contain the participle form of the same main verb *sēn* ‘see’. This verb always appears in the same context, where it seems to function as a predicative adjective and is therefore assigned to the category *ambiguous* in table 1.²¹ The use of *sēn* in the verbal complex *wēsen* + *wērdēn* + present participle might be exclusive to this particular biblical text.

²¹ See also the examples from the MLG sacred prose given by Holmberg (1916:122–124) and the ambiguous cases in MHG listed by Winkler (1913:63–64).

Unlike *wērdēn* in the past indicative, *wērdēn* in the past subjunctive such as in 3c conveys subjunctive mood rather than inchoative aspect. Therefore, this construction is compatible with achievements such as *tōsetten* ‘hire’ in 3c: This example does not convey an ongoing action but one that takes place at a specific moment. In the corpus data, amongst the 16 occurrences with *wērdēn* in the past subjunctive there are 9 instances with an achievement. In none of the 16 instances of *wērdēn* in the past subjunctive + present participle can a distinct aspectual meaning be identified. This might suggest that the construction with this grammatical form expresses mood rather than aspect. Further studies based on more texts are necessary in order to verify this hypothesis.

3.3. Wēsen + Present Participle.

The auxiliary *wēsen* + present participle is used in 61 texts covering all language areas, nearly all genres except for inscriptions, and a time period from the second half of the 13th century till the second half of the 17th century. Table 5 in [Appendix](#) shows the number of occurrences for different grammatical forms of the finite verb, for all texts.

There are 238 occurrences of *wēsen* + present participle in my database. In the majority of cases, *wēsen* is used in the present indicative (118), as in 6a, and in the past indicative (73), as in 6c. The present subjunctive (17), as in 6b, the past subjunctive (13), as in 6d, and the imperative (3), as in 6e, appear less frequently. The auxiliary *wēsen* is also used in a three-part verbal complex with the finite verbs *schōlen* ‘shall’, *willen* ‘want to’ or *mōgen* ‘be able to’ (14), as in 6f.

- (6) a. (...) wen de Mane yn dem teken ys dat ouer
 (...) when the moon in the astrological sign is that over
 dat sulue lydt herschende ys
 the same limb rule-PRS.PTCP be-3SG.PRS.IND

‘When the moon is in the astrological sign which rules over that limb.’
 (Schapherders Kalender, 43r,26–27)

- b. De erde schal gheberen bloyende krud (...) vnd bome
 the earth shall bear blooming herbs (...) and trees
 de de Appel dragen vnde sy frucht
 which apples bear and be-3SG.PRS.SBJV fruit

makende (...)

make-PRS.PTCP (...)

‘The earth shall let the herbs bloom (...) and trees which bear apples and yield the seed (...)’

(Halberst. Bibel 1522, 3va,06–09; 1. Mose 1,11)

- c. Wo sent Ludgher vordan yn Freyslant predigende
how saint Ludger further in Friesland preach-PRS.PTCP

was

be-3SG.PST.IND

‘How Saint Ludger preached further on in Friesland.’

(Cincinnati Liudger 1512, 77v,16–17)

- d. (...) Vnde he denne vnser Ampts bogerende
(...) and he then our guild desire-PRS.PTCP

were (...)

be-3SG.PST.SBJV (...)

‘(...) and if he then desires to be in our guild (...)’

(Reval Schragen 1451–1500, 50r,19)

- e. **Sy** vulbordende de teghen di is
be-SG.IMP agree-PRS.PTCP who against you is
‘Agree with the one who is against you.’

(Lüb. Bibel 1494, 402va,43; Mt 5,25)

- f. he ne **scal** in me cope nenes deles
he not shall-3SG.PRS.IND in the acquisition no part

wachtende **wesen** (...)

be-PRS.PTCP+entitled be-INF (...)

‘He shall not be entitled to any part of the acquisition’

(Brem. StR 1303,04 Originalhandschrift, 54ra,01–03)

As shown in table 2, *wēsen* + present participle has a wide range of meanings. In most sentences where *wēsen* is in the present/past indicative or subjunctive, as in 6a–d, the main verb is a state, an activity

or an accomplishment. The same is true for three-part verbal complexes, as in 6f. Since these verbs denote actions or events that can last for a period of time, it is possible that *wēsen* + present participle emphasizes the durative nature of the event, as noted in the research literature. Note, however, that the use of *wēsen* + present participle is not obligatory in this context: The same meaning can also be expressed by the simple present, as shown by the co-occurrence of *bogerende syn* ‘desire’ with the present indicative form *esschen* ‘request’ in 7a below. Hence, *wēsen* + present participle is an optional device, which seems to be applied due to stylistic or pragmatic reasons. Moreover, the corpus data prove the influence of Latin in translated texts: Two of the three cases with *wēsen* as an imperative, as in 6e, contain the same sentence from the Bible found in different texts. Here the reason for using *wēsen* + present participle lies in a close translation of the Vulgate participle construction (*esto consentiens* ‘be-SG.IMP agreeing’).

Texts such as deeds or legislative and administrative documents that make heavy use of linguistic routines and set phrases (for example, the guild’s order in 7a or the municipal law of Bremen in 6f), may have contributed to the stabilization of participle constructions with specific verbs and their subsequent expansion. This might also be a reason for *wēsen* + present participle appearing in certain contexts. I analyzed three-part verbal complexes with *wēsen* + present participle in the corpus and found that they follow a particular pattern of use. This pattern is particularly consistent in complexes with the verbs *wachten* ‘guard’ and *wāren* ‘last’. Occurrences with these patterns are assigned to the category *set phrase* in table 2. As one can see, three-part verbal complexes with *wēsen* + present participle are mostly used as set phrases.

	Prs. ind.	Prs. sbjv.	Pst. ind.	Pst. sbjv.	Imp.	<i>schölen/willen/ mögen (fin.) + wēsen + prs. ptcp.</i>
present		5				
present (translation from Latin)		3				
past				3		
past (translation from Latin)				2		
future		1				1
future (translation from Latin)		2				
durative	51	6	42	10	1	2
durative (translation from Latin)	21	4	20		2	1
durative (set phrase)	6	2	1			7
conditional/unreal; not durative					1	
conditional/unreal; not durative (translation from Latin)			1			
ambiguous: adjectival/verbal	28	4	5	2		3
ambiguous: adjectival/verbal (translation from Latin)		1				
Total	118	17	73	13	3	14

Table 2. Meanings of *wēsen* + present participle.

In addition to sentences with durative verbs, the data also contain sentences with achievements that do not have a durative meaning, as in 7b,c. In 7b, a future action is referred to. As in other translations of the Vulgate, in the *Evangelistary of Buxtehude* the Latin participle construction (*venturus est* ‘will be coming’) is transferred into MLG (Schröder 1992b:11–13). Additionally, 7c shows a different case

containing the ambiguous token *tokomende* ‘come’, which could also be interpreted as a predicative adjective.²²

- (7) a. Jtem alle de Jenne de vnse ampt **esschen**
 moreover all the ones who our guild request-3PL.PRS.IND
 vnd des bogerende **syn** (...)
 and this desire-PRS.PTCP be-3PL.PRS.IND (...)

‘Moreover, all the people who request and desire to get into our guild (...)’
 (Reval Schragen 1401–1450, 60r,16–17)

- b. de na my komende **is** de is uor
 who after me come-PRS.PTCP be-3SG.PRS.IND this is before
 mi ghemaket
 me made

‘The one who comes after me was made before me’
 (Buxteh. Ev., 03,05–06; Jn 1,15)

- c. Hir vmme witlik sy alle den ghenen
 here for known be-3SG.PRS.SBJV all the ones
 de nu sint . Vnde noch
 who now are . and still
tokomende **sint** (...)
 come-PRS.PTCP+to be-3PL.PRS.IND (...)

‘Therefore, all the people who are here now and still will be should know (...)’
 (Rig. Uk. 1351–1400, 8,04–06)

As the analysis of *wēsen* + present participle shows, this construction expresses a wide range of meanings and is used in a variety of contexts. Apart from emphasizing a durative action, *wēsen* + present participle renders participle constructions in translations of Latin Vulgate texts and

²² *tōkōmende* can be used as an adjective meaning ‘prospective’ (see the dictionary of Lübben & Walther 1888). The special significance of *wēsen* + *tōkōmende* is also mentioned by Holmberg (1916:121).

appears in linguistic routines and set phrases, especially in deeds and legislative and administrative documents.

3.4. Aspectual Meaning and the Semantics of the Main Verb.

Having investigated the range of meanings of *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle as determined by the different grammatical forms of the auxiliary verb, this section focuses on aspectual meaning, namely, the inchoative meaning of *wērdēn* in past tense + present participle and the durative meaning of *wēsen* + present participle. As discussed in section 3.3, the semantics of the main verb (that is, the present participle) has an influence on the meaning of the whole construction. Therefore, the relationship between the main verb and the aspectual meaning of the participle construction needs to be investigated further.

In section 3.2, 21 occurrences of *wērdēn* in past tense + present participle conveying an inchoative meaning were identified, as well as 3 cases that were translations of a participle in the Latin Vulgate (see table 1). Table 3 lists all the main verbs in this construction (the occurrences in Bible translations are given separately), according to their semantic class.²³

As the table shows, 12 occurrences (plus one in a Bible translation) contain verbs expressing emotions, such as *lachen* ‘laugh’.²⁴ Two examples contain the *verba dicendi seggen* ‘say’ and *sprēken* ‘speak’.²⁵ Note, however, that other types of verbs can also appear in this construction. This contrasts with Betten’s (1987:111) observation with respect to the *Prose Tristan*, where the inchoative *werden* + present

²³ To investigate whether in MLG, the inchoative meaning of *wērdēn* in past tense + present participle is especially common with verbs of emotions, as observed by Betten (1987:111) in her analysis of the *Prose Tristan* (see section 2), these verbs are separated in table 3. According to the literature, *verba dicendi* can also have an influence on the use of the participle construction. Therefore, they form another group in table 3. The other verbs, which do not fit into these two categories, are assigned to verb classes based on Vendler 1967.

²⁴ This is in line with the observation of Betten (1987:111) for the *Prose Tristan* (see section 2).

²⁵ Here *rôpen* and *schri(g)en* are not classified as *verba dicendi* since in the actual contexts, such as in the example *Do dat gemeyne volk dat horde/Des worden se ropende vnd schryende* ‘As the people heard that they began to shout and scream’ (Lüb. HistB. L, 10ra,26–29), they refer to loud vocalization meant to express a feeling of dissatisfaction.

participle is restricted to emotion verbs (see section 2). To account for the use of inchoative *werden* + present participle in MLG, all main verbs in the construction were also analyzed using Vendler’s (1967) classification. This analysis gives rise to the following generalization: Although emotion verbs and *verba dicendi* denote actions that in general could go on without an end point, in the actual context they always have an end point, and thus belong to the group of accomplishments. So, all in all, in the majority of the occurrences in table 3 the main verb is an accomplishment. This reveals the special function of the present participle with *wērdēn* in the past tense in MLG, that is, to mark the beginning of an action going on for a specific period of time and ending at some point.

Verb		Verb (Bible translations)	
Verbs expressing emotions		Verbs expressing emotions	
<i>anken</i> ‘sigh’	1	<i>murmurēren</i> ‘grumble’	1
<i>lachen</i> ‘laugh’	5	Others	
<i>rôpen</i> ‘shout’	1	Accomplishments	
<i>schrî(g)en</i> ‘scream’	3	<i>bēven</i> ‘quake’	2
<i>wēnen</i> ‘cry’	2		
Verba dicendi			
<i>seggen</i> ‘say’	1		
<i>sprēken</i> ‘speak’	1		
Others			
Activities			
<i>bernen</i> ‘burn’	2		
<i>süchten</i> ‘breathe stertorously’	1		
Accomplishments			
<i>nâlen</i> ‘near’	1		
<i>prôven</i> ‘prove’	1		
<i>vallen</i> ‘fall’	1		
<i>vlên</i> ‘flee’	1		
Total	21	Total	3

Table 3. Main verbs in the *wērdēn* in past indicative + present participle construction with an inchoative meaning (*n*=24).

Regarding *wēsen* + present participle, the analysis in section 3.3 has shown that in most of the sentences, the main verb is a state, an activity or an accomplishment. Thus, it could be suggested that in MLG, the participle construction was used to emphasize the durativity of the event. Figure 1 shows the number of *wēsen* + present participle constructions occurring with verbs from each aspectual class (the occurrences in Bible translations and set phrases are excluded).

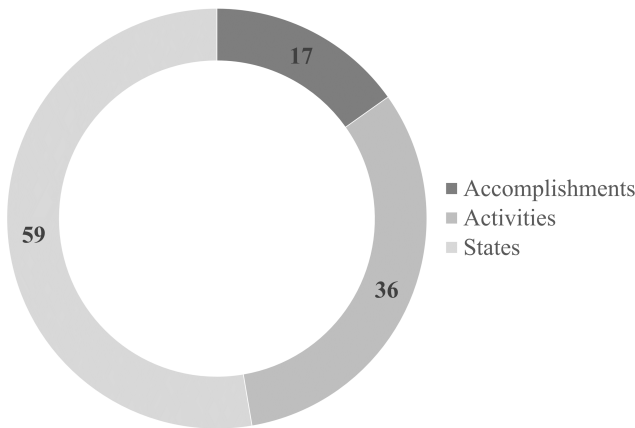


Figure 1. *Wēsen* + present participle construction with a durative meaning ($n=112$).

In more than half of the sentences (59/112), the main verb is a state; in 36 sentences, the main verb is an activity, whereas accomplishments appear rather infrequently (17). Thus, the semantics of the main verb and the durative meaning of the whole construction interact: Since accomplishments necessarily involve an end point, they would be less felicitous in the *wēsen* + present participle construction, which emphasizes duration.

The data show that the two constructions discussed in this section are in complementary distribution with regard to the verb class of the main verb: The inchoative *wērdēn* in past tense + present participle is mainly used with telic verbs (that is, verbs that denote events with an end point), while the durative *wēsen* + present participle is mainly used with atelic verbs (that is, verbs that denote events without a specified end point).

This proves that there is an interaction between the semantics of the main verb and the meaning of the whole construction.

3.5. *Wērdēn/Wēsen* + Present Participle in Different MLG Texts.

The analysis of different grammatical forms and meanings of *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle suggests that the use of this construction could be characteristic of specific texts. In this section, the use of *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle in different MLG texts is investigated further. Tables 4 and 5 in [Appendix](#) do not provide relative frequencies but absolute frequencies. Due to the wide range of meanings expressed by *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle and the number of alternative constructions with those meanings, a relative frequency may not be determined using the total number of tokens in any given text or even the total number of finite *wērdēn/wēsen* in that text. One would need the total number of all construction tokens in the entire corpus, for each particular meaning (for example, future, durative, etc.). Unfortunately, an analysis of all the texts in the corpus would be too time consuming, and so an extensive quantitative investigation of a possible correlation between external factors (time, language area, and genre) and the use of *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle is not feasible. Nevertheless, the absolute frequencies in tables 4 and 5 in [Appendix](#) can provide at least some useful hints at the patterns of occurrence of the construction in MLG.

As already mentioned in sections 3.2 and 3.3, both *wērdēn* and *wēsen* + present participle occurred throughout nearly the whole MLG period, all language areas, and nearly all genres (that is, they were not restricted to particular texts). This suggests that the construction was not a marginal phenomenon but a stable (albeit infrequent) part of the MLG grammar. In general, *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle could be used independently of the nature of the text or the context in which it was produced. However, there were certain conditions that did influence how often *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle actually occurred in any given text. For example, as tables 4 and 5 in [Appendix](#) demonstrate, the Bible texts contain a relatively high number of occurrences. This frequent use is explained both by the content and by the grammatical structure of the translated Latin text. A participle in the Vulgate can be translated by *wēsen* + present participle, and a future form by *wērdēn* in the present indicative + present participle. Thus, the Bible texts tend to use *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle more often.

However, there is no one-to-one relationship between the Latin and MLG texts; the grammatical structure of the Vulgate language does not force the use of the present participle construction, since several alternative constructions expressing the same meaning exist in MLG (see section 3.6). Hence, the use of *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle is a choice of the scribe or printer, and therefore its frequency can vary in different MLG Bible texts, as tables 4 and 5 in [Appendix](#) indicate. Since the ReN does not provide whole Bible texts and the contained passages can differ from one another, no corpus-based word-to-word comparison between all Bible texts and the Latin Vulgate is possible. Therefore, further examination of participles and future forms translated from the Vulgate language into MLG would be necessary to gain insight into translation preferences of different scribes or printers.

Besides the Bible texts, there are two other religious texts that stand out in tables 4 and 5 in [Appendix](#): *Sunte Birgitten openbaringe* (Lüb. Birg. Openb. 1496) with a relatively high number of *wērdēn* + present participle and the *Liudger-Vita of Johannes Cincinnius* (Cincinnius Liudger 1512) with a relatively high number of *wēsen* + present participle. Since both are religious texts, one could hypothesize that the use of participle constructions in the Bible texts might have been extended to other texts of similar genres. As pointed out before, this hypothesis can only be tested in a detailed study that would establish relative frequencies of *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle in such texts.

Another category of texts with several occurrences of *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle are deeds and legislative and administrative documents. As mentioned above, the use of the construction in these texts could be due to their highly formulaic language. The corpus reveals the following difference between the two auxiliaries: *Wērdēn* + present participle occurs in different linguistic contexts, whereas *wēsen* + present participle often appears in certain set phrases, especially with the verbs *wachten* ‘guard’ and *wāren* ‘last’ and the ambiguous word *tōkōmende* ‘come’ that could be interpreted as a predicative adjective meaning ‘prospective’.²⁶

A text from a different genre contains a strikingly high number of *wērdēn* + present participle constructions: *Der schapherders Kalender*

²⁶ According to Holmberg (1916:206), an influence of formulaic language on the use of the participle construction can also be observed in MLG chronicles.

(*Schapherders Kalender*), a calendar that contains, among other things, astrological forecasts (Schröder 2019:152). Such frequent use of *wērdēn* + present participle could be partially explained by the nature of the text: As extended portions of the text deal with astrology—that is, predicting the future based on people’s astrological signs—reference to future events is frequently made. Therefore, certain phrases are often repeated, especially with the verbs *hebben* ‘have’ and *krīgen* ‘get’, for example, *he wert hebbende eyne grote nese* ‘he will get a big nose’. However, as mentioned above, one has to keep in mind that the future meaning can be expressed by alternative grammatical constructions and that the use of *wērdēn* + present participle is not determined by content alone.

As these observations show, in order to evaluate the choice of *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle in a text correctly, one has to gain a deeper insight into the use of alternative constructions. The next section discusses the use of alternatives to the present participle construction with *wērdēn*.

3.6. Wērdēn + Present Participle and Alternative Constructions.

A comprehensive study of *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle and all the possible alternatives in the whole corpus would be too time consuming and is therefore beyond the scope of the present research. However, an analysis on a smaller scale—examining alternative ways to express future—is quite feasible. Such an analysis could provide an initial insight into this issue and become the basis for future investigations.

For the purposes of this analysis, *Der schapherders Kalender* was chosen, as it contains the most occurrences of *wērdēn* in the present + present participle with the future meaning. According to the MLG grammar books, apart from *wērdēn* + present participle MLG could use two other constructions to express a future meaning: *wērdēn* in the present + infinitive and a modal verb (*schōlen/willen/mōten*) in the present tense + infinitive. In addition, the simple present can also convey a future meaning (Lübben 1882:91, Lasch 1914/1974:222–223, paragraph 412, note 6, Sarauw 1924:225).

In this section, I focus on the verbal complex constructions that occur in variation with *wērdēn* + present participle. All occurrences of *wērdēn* + infinitive and *schōlen/willen/mōten* + infinitive were identified in *Der schapherders Kalender*, after which the results were checked to

eliminate false positives.²⁷ Figure 2 shows the number of occurrences for each of the five variants; only unambiguous cases were included in the analysis.

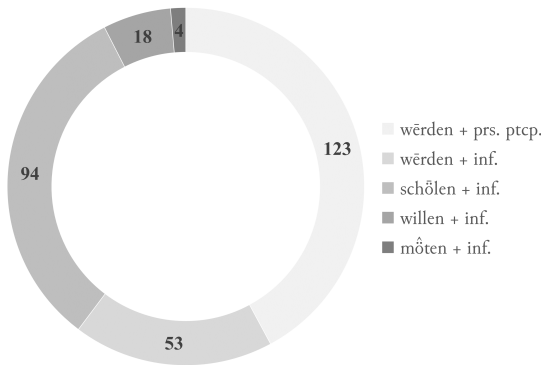


Figure 2. Different verbal complex constructions expressing future in *Der schapherders Kalender* (only unambiguous cases; $n=292$).

As figure 2 shows, *wērdēn* + present participle occurs 123 times in *Der schapherders Kalender* and is the dominant variant for expressing future. An alternative construction, *wērdēn* + infinitive, is used only 53 times to convey the same meaning. In the modal verb + infinitive construction, *schōlen* occurs most frequently (94), *willen* is used rather infrequently (18), and *mōten* appears only marginally (4).

A closer look at the data reveals that there is no clear preference for any one variant; different variants often occur side by side, for example, *wērdēn* + present participle/infinitive, as in 8a (where the present participle and the infinitive even share the same auxiliary), or *wērdēn* + infinitive and *schōlen* + infinitive, as in 8b. This use of different constructional variants to express the same meaning might be a conscious stylistic choice of the printer in order to avoid too many

²⁷ Therefore, in ANNIS the query *lemma_wsd="wērdēn" _= _pos="VAFIN" & pos=/V.INF/ & bound_sent & #4 _i_ #1 & #4 _i_ #3 & meta::abbr_ddd="Schapherders Kalender"* and the query *pos="VMFIN" & pos=/V.INF/ & bound_sent & #3 _i_ #1 & #3 _i_ #2 & meta::abbr_ddd="Schapherders Kalender"* were used.

structural repetitions and thus make the text, which contains formulaic language and rather frequent repetitions of phrases, less monotonous.

- (8) a. Vnde **wert** vele gudes wynnende
 and become-3SG.PRS.IND many good get-PRS.PTCP
 vnd wedder vorlesen.
 and again lose-INF.
 ‘and (he) will get many goods and lose them again’
 (Schapherders Kalender, 54v,22)

- b. vnde se **werden** syn vnkusch / vnde se
 and they become-3PL.PRS.IND be-INF impure / and they
scholen van den vynden gequelet werden /
 shall-3PL.PRS.IND by the enemies tortured become-INF
 ‘and they will be impure and will be tortured by their enemies’
 (Schapherders Kalender, 50v,09–11)

The analysis above focuses on *Der schapherders Kalender* and thus sheds light on the variation between different constructions expressing the future within the same text. However, different texts reflect different preferences as far as expression of the future is concerned. In the passage 2nd Mose 20,9 found in the *Bible of Köln*, the *Bible of Lübeck*, and the *Bible of Halberstadt*, a Latin Vulgate future construction is translated by different complex verbal constructions: The *Bible of Köln* and the *Bible of Halberstadt* have *schölen* + infinitive, as in 9a,b, whereas in the *Bible of Lübeck*, *wērdēn* + present participle is used, as in 9c.

- (9) a. Sees daghe **schalt** u werken
 six days shall-2SG.PRS.IND you work-INF
 vnde **schalt** all dyn werck doen.
 and shall-2SG.PRS.IND all your work do-INF
 ‘Six days you will work and will do all your work’
 (Kölner Bibel Ku 1478,79, 40ra,25–26; 2nd Mose 20,9)

- b. Ses dage **schalt** u arbeyden /
 six days shall-2SG.PRS.IND you work-INF /

vnd **schalt** al dyne werke don
 and shall-2SG.PRS.IND all your works do-INF

‘Six days you will work and will do all your works’
 (Halberst. Bibel, 39va,23–25; 2nd Mose 20,9)

c. Sos daghe lank . ¶ yn der weken // **werdest** u
 six days long . ¶ in the week // become-2SG.PRS.IND you
arbeydende vnde **werdest** donde alle dine
 work-PRS.PTCP and become-2SG.PRS.IND do-PRS.PTCP all your
 werke.
 works

‘Six days of the week you will work and will do all your works’
 (Lüb. Bibel, 40va,33–35; 2nd Mose 20,9)

The relatively high number of occurrences in the ReN extract of the *Bible of Lübeck* of *wērdēn* in present tense + present participle expressing future (see table 1 above and table 4 in [Appendix](#)) could indicate that this particular translator had a special preference for this construction. However, to verify this hypothesis, more research is needed. To gain a better understanding of the translator’s preferences, one would need to analyze translations of all expressions with a future meaning across the three Bible texts in their entirety.

4. Conclusion.

As the overview on *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle in MLG and related languages has shown, there is a range of different temporal and aspectual meanings the construction can have depending on the type and the grammatical form of the auxiliary. However, previous studies and grammaticographical descriptions differ somewhat in what meaning they attribute to which version of the *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle construction.

With regard to the grammatical form of the construction, the analysis based on corpus data from the ReN 1.0 revealed that the auxiliaries *wērdēn* and *wēsen* occur in different tenses and moods, and even as infinitives in three-part verbal complexes. *Wērdēn* + present participle is observed not only with aspectual but also with temporal meanings. In the

present indicative and as part of a three-part verbal complex with the modal verbs *schōlen* or *kūnnen*, it is mainly used to express future events, whereas *wērdēn* in the past indicative + present participle predominantly conveys inchoative aspect. These findings are in line with the observations made in the literature on MLG and related historical varieties. However, as far as *wērdēn* in the past indicative + present participle is concerned, there are some exceptions, that is, this construction does not always have an inchoative meaning. In several cases, the sentence with the participle follows a subordinate temporal clause or is a temporal clause itself. Here the participle might be used to mark the temporal connection between the two events, with one taking place immediately after the other. Furthermore, the data contain constructions with the present participles of the achievements *entslāpen* ‘fall asleep’ and *entwāken* ‘wake up’. It is possible that these particular instances of the construction had become lexicalized.

It has been noted in literature that *wēsen* + present participle mainly occurs with states, activities, and accomplishments, with the participle emphasizing the durative nature of the event. However, the participle construction is only one option, which can be used for stylistic or pragmatic reasons. It may, for example, occur in set phrases used in formulaic language, especially in deeds and legislative and administrative texts. The analysis also revealed some exceptions: The data contain cases of *wēsen* + present participle with no durative meaning used to render Latin Vulgate participles. Some ambiguous cases were identified as well that could be classified either as participle constructions or as copula constructions with a predicative adjective. The same ambiguity is also observed in case of *wērdēn* + present participle.

With respect to the relationship between the semantics of the main verb and the aspectual meaning of the construction, it has been shown that *wērdēn* in the past indicative + present participle with an inchoative meaning and *wēsen* + present participle with a possible durative meaning are in complementary distribution: The former occurs mainly with telic verbs—that is, verbs that denote events with an end point—with the construction marking the beginning of the event. The latter is mostly used with atelic verbs—that is, verbs that denote events without an end point. As ongoing events without an end point are, by definition, durative, the meaning of the main verb and the durative meaning of the construction fit together perfectly.

A more thorough quantitative analysis of the use of *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle in different MLG texts is problematic due to limited data available. In particular, one would need a database containing all possible alternative constructions from the entire corpus. Nevertheless, the present study has identified a number of tendencies, which could be further explored in future research. It has been shown that the *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle construction was not restricted to particular MLG texts, as it appears throughout nearly the whole MLG period, across all language areas and nearly all genres. The frequency of the construction can, however, be influenced by the nature of the text and the circumstances in which it was created. For example, translations of the Latin Vulgate tend to have a higher occurrence of *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle, presumably due to the grammatical properties of the original language. Yet an examination of selected translations of Latin Vulgate future forms into MLG in different Bible texts suggests that *wērdēn* + present participle was one of several constructions that conveyed the same meaning, and that its use could be a choice of a particular scribe or printer.

Besides the Bible translations and other religious texts, *Der schapherders Kalender* also contains a relatively high number of *wērdēn* + present participle, which is partly due to the content of the astrology section. Moreover, the analysis of this text has revealed a clear preference for *wērdēn* + present participle, although constructions with *wērdēn* + infinitive and with modal verb + infinitive are also used to convey future meaning.

The study of MLG corpus data presented in this paper confirms the descriptions of *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle found in the literature, and it complements those earlier descriptions with new insights regarding the structure, meaning, and use of the construction. The present analysis could serve as a basis for further studies, which could, for example, compare *wērdēn/wēsen* + present participle with corresponding constructions in the older varieties of High German or English. Such comparison would allow one to create a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon in the Germanic languages.

APPENDIX

The appendix is accessible via the following DOI:

<http://doi.org/10.25592/uhhfdm.11455>, accessed on February 08, 2023.

MIDDLE LOW GERMAN DATA SOURCES

The following information is taken from the metadata of the ReN:

- Brem. StR 1303,04 Originalhandschrift = Bremer Stadtrecht, Originalhandschrift. 1303–1304. Staatsarchiv Bremen, 2-P.5.b.2.a.1.
- Buxteh. Ev. = Qvatuor Evangeliorum versio Saxonica. Buxtehude around 1480. Königliche Bibliothek Kopenhagen, Thott 8, 8°.
- Cincinnatius Liudger 1512 = Johannes Cincinnius: Liudger-Vita. 1512. Münster, Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen, Abteilung Westfalen (LA NRW, Abt. WF), Altertumsverein Münster Msc. 136.
- Halberst. Bibel 1522 = Halberstädter Bibel. Halberstadt 1522: Ludwig Trutebul, 1. Mose 1,1 – Romans 7,12. München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, B3Kat-ID: BV035304241.
- Lüb. Bibel 1494 = Biblia. Lübeck 1494: Steffen Arndes. München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Ink B-495.
- Lüb. Birg. Openb. 1496 = Sunte Birgitten openbaringe. Lübeck 1496: Mohnkopf. Göttingen, Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek. I. E. Sanct 39a (Inc.).
- Lüb. HistB. L = Historienbibel, Hs. L. 21 February 1470. Lübeck, Stadtbibliothek, Ms. Theol. Germ. 8.
- Lüb. Jüt. LB = Jutisch Lowbok. Lübeck 1485: Matthaeus Brandis. Oldenburg, Landesbibliothek; Kopenhagen, Kgl. Bib., CIM. II, 248 b.; Arbeitsnegativ L. N. Mikro Nr. 132.
- Reval Schragen 1451–1500 = 5 guild's orders from Reval. Tallinn (Reval) 1451–1500. National Archives of Estonia/Tallinn City Archives, REV3: TLA.190.2.70; REV8: TLA.190.2.549; REV9: TLA.190.2.149; REV4: TLA.190.2.642; REV12: TLA.190.2.24.
- Rig. Uk. 1351–1400 = 10 digitized deeds from Riga from the ASoR, 1351–1400.
- Schapherders Kalender = Der schapherders Kalender. Rostock 1523, Ludwig Dietz. Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, A: 36 Astron.
- Val. u. Nam. Stockh. Hs. = Valentin vnde Namelos, Stockholmer Handschrift (Hs. Cod. Holm. Vu 73). Around 1420. Stockholm, Königliche Bibliothek, Cod. Holm. Vu 73.

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