

# Tracking grammatical change

## A long-term survey of German

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### PROJECT "GRAMMATICAL CHANGE IN PRESENT-DAY GERMAN"

**Problem:** new variants have low frequency in corpora → hard to find, hard to distinguish from errors (e.g. typos);  
language in corpora is mostly produced by professional writers → little access to potentially innovative speaker groups

**Solution:** tracking (potentially) changing linguistic phenomena in real time

**Method:** survey at regular intervals (every 3 years) for an extended time period (50 years minimum)



### PILOT STUDY

**Aim:** evaluation of question types and social variables

**Phenomenon:** case selection of secondary prepositions  
(cf. Di Meola 2000, 2003, 2006, 2009; Vieregge 2018, 2019a, 2019b)

**Questionnaire:**

- 2 context versions: formal vs. informal
- 3 question types (gap, rating, 2AFC) in different orders (3)

**Responses:**

- distribution via personal networks & Prolific (Dec 23 – Mar 24)
- 72 randomly assigned versions on SoSciSurvey platform
- 643 completed questionnaires

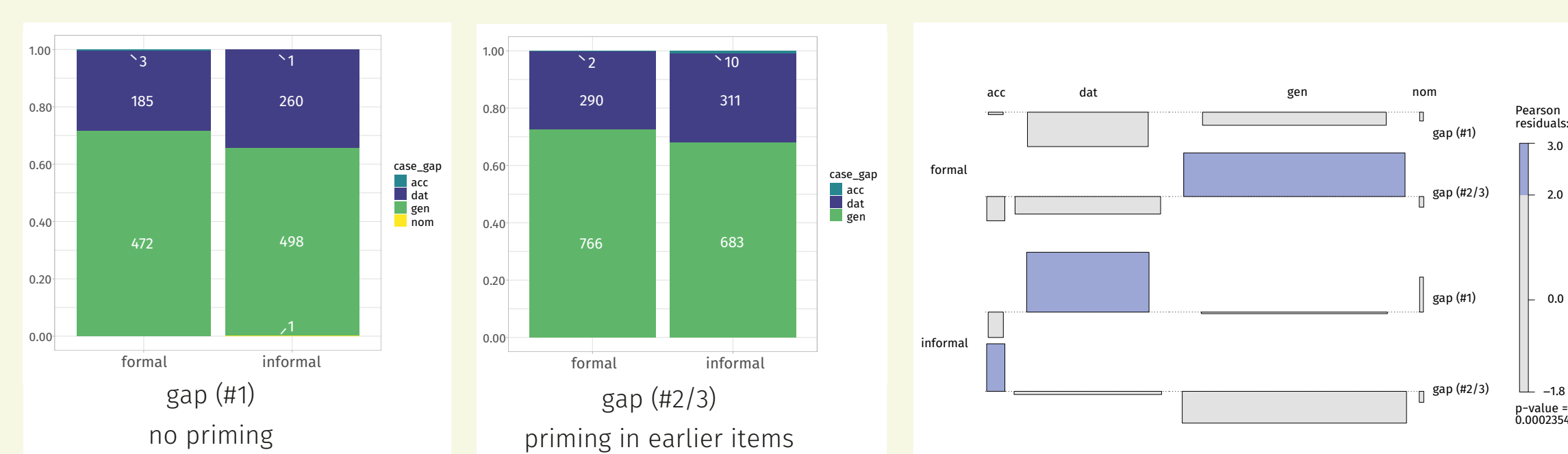
corpus freq. (new case)	dative → genitive	genitive → dative
high	troz 'despite', dank 'thanks to'	wegen 'because of', laut 'according to'
medium	gemäß 'according to', entlang 'along'	einschließlich 'including', während 'during'
low	seit 'since', entsprechend 'according to'	hinsichtlich 'concerning', mangels 'for lack of'

context	text
	Du hast dich mit einer Agentur für Stadtführungen selbstständig gemacht und gerade deine erste Tour mit guten Freunden beendet. Du sagst ihnen zum Abschluss: 'You have set up your own agency for city tours and have just finished your first guided tour with good friends. As you wrap up, you tell them:'
gap	Die Tour hat hoffentlich trotz _____ Spaß gemacht. [verregnet – Wetter]
rating	Die Tour hat hoffentlich trotz dem verregneten Wetter Spaß gemacht. ★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆
2AFC	Die Tour hat hoffentlich trotz dem verregneten Wetter Spaß gemacht. Die Tour hat hoffentlich trotz des verregneten Wetters Spaß gemacht.

'I hope you have enjoyed the tour despite the rainy weather.'

### CONTEXT & PRIMING THROUGH QUESTION TYPE



**Context type:** genitive → formal, dative → informal

**Priming through question type** (cf. Fleischer et al. 2012):

- no priming (gap in first position): more datives in informal contexts
- some priming (gap in later position): more genitives in formal contexts

### AGE

- **expectation:** language change in apparent time (cf. Bailey et al. 1991), older speakers → established variant, younger speakers → innovative variant
- **finding:** age grading (cf. Labov 1994), older speakers return to more informal variant



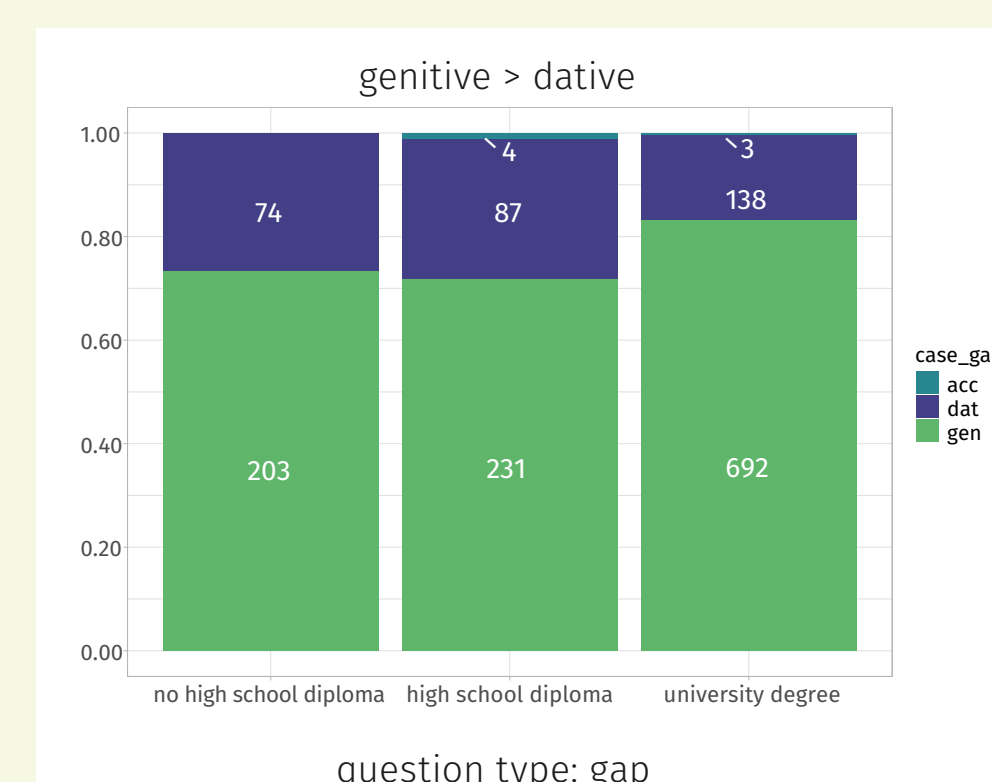
### EDUCATION

- gen > dat: higher education degree → more genitives

- dat > gen: no significant differences

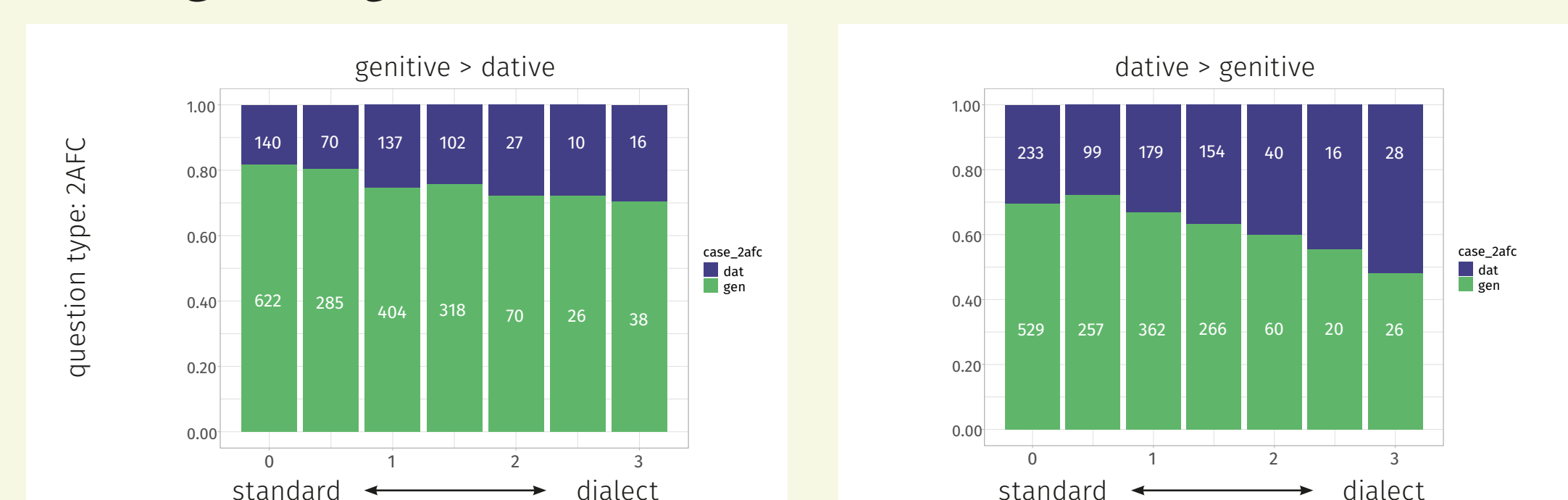
higher formal education

→ conservative / standard-conforming behaviour



### DIALECT USE

- **operationalization:** use of dialect, regional, or standard language with family, friends, and at work
- **finding:** strong correlation between dialect use and dative use



### SUMMARY

**Methodical evaluation:** differences as expected

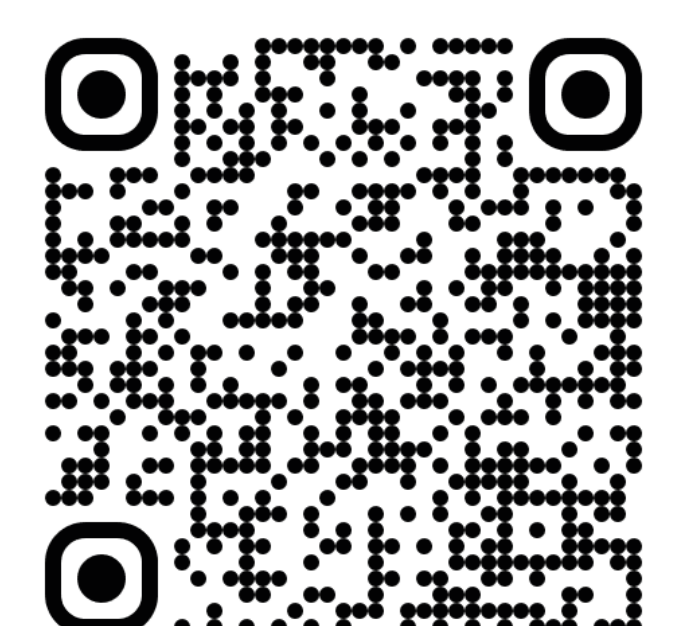
- sociodemographic questions are working
- contexts (formal / informal) are working
- priming effects through question types, should be combined carefully

**Language change in synchronic data:**

- more datives for dialect users and speakers without higher education degree → genitive remains a marker of written / formal standard
- age grading pattern → no (measurable) spread of innovative genitives → **real-time data needed**

### References:

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