

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910969799003321
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Titolo	Präteritumschwund und Diskursgrammatik : Präteritumschwund in gesamteuropäischen Bezügen--areale Ausbreitung, heterogene Entstehung, Parsing sowie diskursgrammatische Grundlagen und Zusammenhänge // von Werner Abraham, C. Jac Conradie
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Amsterdam ; ; Philadelphia, : J. Benjamins Pub. Co., c2001
ISBN	9786612162305 9781282162303 1282162306 9789027297969 9027297967
Edizione	[1st ed.]
Descrizione fisica	xii, 148 p. : ill., maps
Altri autori (Persone)	ConradieC. J
Disciplina	415
Soggetti	Grammar, Comparative and general - Tense Linguistic change Discourse analysis German language - Discourse analysis Grammar, Comparative and general - Parsing
Lingua di pubblicazione	Tedesco
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Bibliographic Level Mode of Issuance: Monograph
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references (p. [137]-144) and index.
Nota di contenuto	Präteritumschwund und Diskursgrammatik -- Title page -- LCC data -- Table of contents -- Abstract -- Chapter 1: Präteritumschwund in gesamteuropäischen Bezügen -- Chapter 2: Präteritumschwund (PS) im frühen Afrikaans -- Chapter 3: Der oberdeutsche Präteritumschwund unter neuer methodischer Sicht -- Chapter 4: Parsing- und diskursprominente Eigenschaften des Deutschen -- Chapter 5: Die Diskursfunktionen Thema -Rhema: Deutsche Grammatik zwischen Diskursprominenz und Parsingregularitäten -- Chapter 6: Basisstruktur des deutschen Satzes unter diskursfunktionalem Gewicht: Inhaltlich-funktionale Kategorien und ableit -- Chapter 7: Das Jiddische mit Präteritumschwund: SVO als Syntaxcalque aus dem Slawischen, SOV als deutsche Diskursstrategie -- Chapter 8: Schluß zur parsing - methodischen Exerzitie über den Präteritumschwund allgemein und im

Sommario/riassunto

This work demonstrates that what is commonly called 'preterite decay in Upper German' (PS; cf. German Präteritumschwund) is in fact a phenomenon common to a great number of European languages, all of which are in areal con-tact. However, the conclusion that this is a phenomenon arising under areal influence appears clearly mistaken - not only so because it would no more than postpone the search for the real trigger of this development. It will be shown, first, that the preterite loss in the languages under inspection comes in different states of completion. It will be seen that the loss of the preterite, under this perspective, German is by no means a completed process. Second, and what is more, it will be argued that the trigger for this decay of the synthetic preterite and its replacement by analytic preterite forms is the specific criteria under which oral (as opposed to written) communication is executed. Counter to the rich, existing literature on the topic, a number of parsing principles will be claimed to be responsible for this diachronic development yielding different results due to a different execution of these principles.
