

ORIGIN AND ANALYSIS OF DELETION IN INVERSION IN MIDDLE LOW GERMAN

This study focuses on a special kind of verbal ending in Middle Low German (MLG) arising in the first and second person plural (1st and 2nd pl.). In inversion contexts, the regular unitary inflection ending in the plural, which genuinely alternates between *-t/-n*, drops (cf. (1a) and (2a) for inversion without and (1b) and (2b) with a topic) (Lasch 1974²:227).

- (1) a. *late wy ene* 'Let us leave him alone' (Buxtehuder Evangeliar)
b. *Nu bekenne wi [...]* 'Now we confess [...]' (Buxtehuder Evangeliar)
- (2) a. *Wylle gij na dessem leuende myt vrowden syn*
'Do you want to be joyful after this life?' (Marienklage)
b. *Nu schulle gy horen vnde merken rechte [...]*
'Now you will hear and learn truly [...]' (Buxtehuder Evangeliar)

A corpus study of 13,500 finite clauses delivers new data from the whole period in which MLG was written, showing that this type of deletion is robustly attested in all main dialect areas. The ending drops in 95.15% of all cases. Main exceptions are imperatives with expressed vocatives (ex. (4a)) and verbs in 1st or 2nd pl. in the 2nd conjunct of a coordinated structure with *vnde* 'and'. Subjunctive and indicative mood are equally affected.

MLG deletion is virtually omnipresent, making it difficult to trace whether it originated in one specific environment. Therefore, a closer look at temporarily overlapping or related languages is necessary. Another difficulty tracing the origins of the structure is that the predecessor of MLG, Old Saxon (OS), has no occurrences of deletion at all (Sehrt 1925). One might argue that deletion is not visible due to the smaller amount of data, and that OS might have had sparse examples of deletion that coincidentally not show up in the small amount of available texts. This hypothesis has been tested statistically by comparing the amount of examples with and without deletion within the OS data and the Old English (OE) data in the YCOE (TAYLOR et al. 2003), as the phenomenon is present in OE as well (Hogg & Fulk 2011:214-215). The difference between deletion in OS and OE is statistically significant on the 1%-level in Fisher's exact test, i.e. the fact that the OS text(s) (fragments) show no deletion, is not a coincidence: the datasets show no significant correlation and thus are completely differently concerning deletion. This could mean that the deletion in OS only developed after the 9th century during the time in which there is an attestation gap in which Latin was the writing language in the area, but could also support the criticized position of the attested OS text fragments as representative for the spoken predecessor language of MLG. The last idea is supported by the facts that the closely related Ingvaënic languages Old Frisian (cf. Hoekstra 2001 and temporarily overlapping with MLG) and OE (providing the oldest examples of deletion) do have deletion and that MLG has it in such a great extent, even in the earliest texts. In other West Germanic languages like Old and Middle Dutch, and Old and Middle High German, deletion happens far less frequent and much later than in OE, which might point in the direction of borrowing. Deletion in OE in particular suggests that deletion is a much older phenomenon, which has been present in Ingvaënic even before the Anglo-Saxon settlement of Britain from the early 5th century onwards (cf. Sanders 1973:30).

The large amount of OE data, in which deletion is common – though not as common as in MLG – can (indirectly) shed a light on the origin and spread of the deletion. We designed queries to search through all clauses with a finite verb followed by a 1st or 2nd pl. pronoun in inversion in the YCOE. The output shows that person, mood and tense have a statistically significant influence on the possibility of deletion. The deletion clearly spreads from the 2nd pl. present tense in the subjunctive mood.

Questions to be addressed for the analysis are (i) why another verb form arises, (ii) why deletion exclusively takes place in inversion, (iii) why it happens only ever in the first and second person plural and (iv) why the ending of the imperative is not affected.

We propose a change that originates in the prosodic phrase of 2nd pl. verb in the subjunctive mood followed by the 2nd pl. pronoun, following Ackema & Neeleman (2003) who propose deletion to occur within phonological phrases in which readjustment rules can apply. The difference between clauses with inversion and subject initial ones is that subject and verb belong to the same prosodic phrase in inversion (3a), whereas they belong to a different prosodic phrase in clauses without inversion (3b). This results from the fact that the verb takes a different position in inversion (Zwart 1993). In languages with a left-alignment property, the right edges of XP's correspond to the right boundaries of prosodic phrases (cf. (3a) and (3b)).

- (3) a. [CP [C bidde [IP [DP gy] [...]]] → {bidde gy} (phrasing in MLG)
 b. [IP [DP gy] [I bidden] [...]] → {gy}{bidden} (phrasing in MLG)

A condition for deletion is that the verb immediately dominates the pronoun. Therefore, deletion does not apply in imperatives (with or without an overt vocative), as we argue that the imperative does not immediately dominate the pronoun: An intervenor can appear between imperative and vocative (4b), but not between indicatives/subjunctives and pronoun.

- (4) a. *gat gy vormaliededen* 'Go, you accursed ones!' (Psalms 15th c.)
 b. *Seet o sote maria [...]* 'See o sweet Mary [...]' (Dat myrren bundeken)

The change in the phrase is initially phonologically triggered by adjacency of the consonant in the coda of the verb and the initial velar of the pronoun, accelerated by analogy to the 1st and 3rd sg. (f.i. *bidde ick*, lit. 'pray I'). Deletion analogically extends to 1st pl., but not to 3rd, as it is blocked by the longer coda *-nǫ*, which pre-existed quite long – only in the present, where the change starts – until changing to the *Einheitsplural* (Gallée 1891:246). The deletion spreads to other moods and tenses by analogical levelling. It remains a feature specific to 1st and 2nd pl., even when *-nǫ* in the 3rd person is completely lost, consolidating the *Einheitsplural*. Because of this, the structure early developed a systematic character, as a different ending in 1st and 2nd pl. corresponds to a distinction between regular plural markings (3rd pl.) and speech act participant markers (participant (Prt)/addressee (Adr)). In this way, the phonological change gets reinterpreted as a systematic one. The allomorphic rule behind the new systematic change in MLG means that the common morphosyntactic features that are carried by the verb and the pronoun and which are normally only spelled out by the pronoun will be spelled out by the verb as well in this specific environment, if the verb and the pronoun holding a common plural feature are in the same phonological phrase. In non-inversion contexts, only the plural feature is spelled out, resulting in the regular endings of the *Einheitsplural*.

- (5) a. {[V Pl] ... [D Pl, Prt]} → {[V Pl, Prt] ... [D Pl, Prt]}
 b. {[V Pl] ... [D Pl, Prt, Add]} → {[V Pl, Prt, Add] ... [D Pl, Prt, Add]}

The rule results in the situation in some modern Low German dialects, which distinguish all persons in the plural, but only in inversion (Höhle 1997:109-110).

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