

DFF Project Description

The Middle Danish language in the light of a modern theory of grammaticalisation

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1. Introduction, purpose and aims

Research in Middle Danish (MD) is lagging far behind where the application of current developments in theoretical and descriptive linguistics is concerned. Written MD is represented by two main dialects, the more archaic Scanic dialect and the language west of the Sound, referred to here as Western Danish (see sec. 7). MD differs in important typological respects from Modern Danish, but many differences have been either ignored or misinterpreted. Overall descriptions of its stages do not exist. Morphology has been central, but the linguistic basis has consistently been *Jung-grammarians*. Syntax has been particularly neglected, both with respect to the application of theory and to the utilisation of linguistic sources.

The aim of the project is to contribute to the development of a linguistic theory of grammaticalisation (sec. 2) and to provide profound insights into the structure and development of the Danish language (sec. 3). Where the latter is concerned:

- (a) The new insights as to the grammatical structure of MD will provide a basis for future detailed grammars of MD (primarily by the present applicant).
- (b) The linguistic changes will be seen as complex and connected changes involving both morphology and syntax.
- (c) The results will provide a frame of reference for future philological research in the area, and
- (d) It will shed light on a set of features of the modern language, the origins of which have not been explained, for instance: the concord construction, the unitary stress construction (incorporation) and the positional rules for certain adverbials.

The following example of the MD topic-construction will illustrate the way philology might profit from precise and explicit syntactic descriptions:

- (1) thæn, thæt tharf, tha lat thæt i øghæt (Medical Handbook AM 187 20,19)
'the (person) this needs, then put it into the eye'
he who needs it, put it (a remedy) into his eye

This construction has been misinterpreted as anacoluthic or as Latin influence; according to a modern analysis, the fronted constituent presents the topic of the sentence, with no demand that the referent(s) of this constituent must be part of the inner semantico-syntactic structure of the sentence: Thus, a change of perspective inside the construction will not violate any grammatical rules.

2. Theoretical basis and issues

At this level, the aim of the project is to test a theory of grammaticalisation, the process through which grammatical structure arises, develops and disintegrates. The main applicant is co-author of an international book on grammaticalisation: J. Nørgård-Sørensen, L. Heltoft & L. Schøsler: *Connecting Grammaticalisation* (CG, 2011), and this book will serve as the point of departure. CG is critical of mainstream international schools of grammaticalisation that take grammatical development to be one-way: from syntactically unbound entities (words) to increasingly bound inflectional elements (standard handbook: Hopper & Traugott 2003). Grammatical status proper is typically assumed to be found in morphology, and of particular interest are the changes of words into desinences (as in the Danish passive ending *-s* in *hentes* 'is fetched', from the reflexive pronoun *sig*, Old Danish form *sik*). In contrast to this, the authors of CG argue that grammaticalisation should also cover (new) grammation and (further) regrammation of constructions and word order patterns. Especially word order changes seem to be a neglected or misinterpreted domain, since they are often taken to be secondary effects of grammatical change proper (Sun & Traugott 2011). Especially within American linguistics, researchers neglect what European linguists call the paradigmatic dimension of language, and it is no surprise that the school of C. Lehmann, esp. G. Diewald (2009) and Diewald & Smirnova (2011), comes closest to CG's position, but we are not aware that anyone has formulated research questions like the ones to follow below, let alone answered them.

The basic idea in CG is that the concept of a morphological paradigm can be refined and generalised to cover constructional options and word order options as well. Heltoft (2011) argues that word order differences can organise as grammatical oppositions in a way basically analogous to morphological paradigms: They form paradigms (cf. also Nørgård-Sørensen & Heltoft 2015). From this stance, the aim of our project is the development and test of a linguistic theory, using data that are highly relevant for Danish linguistics and medieval philology.

The main applicant will develop and refine models for the description of the synchronic stages of word order. Relatively simply topological models in the Danish tradition of P. Diderichsen (1943, 1946) will be employed, but the well-known model for the modern language is not adequate for the present purpose. Thus, a dependency model for the analysis of constructional syntax will also be developed. This model will be relatively simple, but it will include the relation of interdependency (or nexus), a concept not used in e.g. minimalist syntax (Heltoft 2013 offers an initial discussion in Danish). We need no formal apparatus but merely adequate descriptions of the way constructional syntax contributes to contrasts between constructions in paradigms. Grammatical change consists of two types of processes, different in principle (cf. Andersen 1973, 2001, 2006). One is **reanalysis**, the process in which users invoke normative assumptions about the rule system followed by other

users. Users reconfirm their assumed rule and norm consensus. Inevitably, their guesses will sometimes be wrong, leading user 1's image of the language to differ from that of user 2. No doubt, the topic-construction has been marginalised through (wrong) user reanalyses assuming that the sentence **must** contain an anaphor for the topic-constituent; as a consequence, they will only reproduce such variants. The second process is **actualisation**, the spread of the innovation and its acceptance by other users and groups of users in society – if successful, in growing circles and domains. This study presupposes quantitative investigations of central sources, see below.

3. Morphological and syntactic issues

3.1. *Morphology*. No general systematic overviews exist of the differences and distribution of archaic and innovative forms. Take the so-called loss of final *-r* in endings, often described as a kind of sound change. In modern theoretical terms, this is a case of regrammation (Andersen 2006), i.e. a reorganisation of the sign values of the grammatical system. The desinence *-r* does not disappear from noun inflection; it is rather reinterpreted as a marked plural ending: *sak-ir* nom/acc.pl. 'charges; cases, instances' retains its *-r*, but the original gen.sg. *sakar* turns into *saka*.

The Scanic material provides our best possible sources to the study of morphological regrammation. This calls for analyses of its paradigmatic systems in terms of markedness relations, as found with respect to case in the Scanic Law in Jensen (2011) and Petersen (forthcoming). On the basis of such overviews, the reanalyses presupposed can be laid out, and hypotheses can be formulated about the details of the actualisation processes (see below). Nielsen (forthcoming) provides a resource for a functional interpretation of morphology as a sign theory.

3.2. *Syntax*. The syntax of MD differs from that of the modern language in important respects. Initial studies by Heltoft (2015) show that numerous typological archaisms have been preserved in both Scanic and Western Danish irrespective of the different morphologies, archaisms comprising the topic-construction, the widespread use of zero anaphors (omission of pronouns), OV-word order and indirect object constructions. The following issues are relevant for the post doc-projects.

Where word order is concerned, MD allows e.g. objects to precede the non-finite verb, so-called OV or XV order. In (2), the genitive object *biscops* precedes the non-finite verb:

(2) vm ænnar man (...) vil æy biscops i bygd bitha (SkKl, GL 16, 15-18)

'if a man will not bishop in village await'

if a man will not await the bishop in his village'

From 1300 onwards, examples occur with two or more core constituents preceding the **finite** verb.

(3) tha the vpa mærit como (SjT GL 330);

'when they at sea (local actant) came'

when they had come out to sea

Superficially, this might look like a reverse development allowing final position for the finite verb, as known from High German. This is hardly the case; rather, it is a forerunner of the Modern Danish subordinate clause word order, where free adverbials precede the finite verb: *at han ikke forstod ideen* (lit. that he not understood the point). Normally, this development is simply referred to as a piecemeal inversion of the order V > Advb to Advb. > V, but this is just as ad hoc as the idea of an *r*-loss in morphology, and it leaves the generalisation of XV-order in (2) as a kind of dead end. What is needed is an integrated view of such changes on the basis of an analysis of the linguistic input and output stages and of the reanalyses that the word order systems undergo. The ambition here is to show where the modern subordinate clause order came from and how it developed.

Where constructional syntax is concerned, topic-constructions are one such archaism. Another is the syntax and semantics of indirect object constructions. The MD indirect object had a wider constructional range than in the modern language, including free (optional) indirect objects (FIO), where the modern language would demand a PP-construction. In a legend about St. Christine, her father is preparing her execution:

(4) Vrbanus gat ey thold then harm, men lot henne eth hiull giøræ K4, GL 275, 29-30

'Urbanus could not bear this mockery, but let her a wheel do

Urbanus could not bear this mockery, but had a wheel prepared for her

Moreover, 'free' word order for indirect and direct objects (IO and DO) is retained throughout the period, cf. (5). Word order does not mark grammatical relations, but probably information structure.

(5) æn wilt thou mic thæt æi sighæ ac scal giuæ thit kiøt undæ diur at ætæ Frag = GL 284, 10-12

'but will you me (IO) this (DO) not tell, I shall give your flesh (DO) predators (IO) to eat'

but if you will not tell me this, I shall give predators your flesh to eat

4. The subprojects

4.1. Ph.D. Kathrine Thisted Petersen's project is concerned with **The morphology of early 15th century texts**. The Scanic material provides our best possible sources for the study of morphological regrammation. The purpose is to set up the paradigms in terms of markedness relations, as done with respect to case in the Scanic Law in Jensen (2011) and Petersen (forthcoming). The latter publication excels particularly in the identification of semantic relations between morphology and syntax.

4.2. Ph.D. Sebastian Møller Bak: **The development of XV order** in subordinate clauses from 1300-1500. SMB will conduct a quantitative investigation of the spread of the XV-construction in time and across genres. The investigation will be sensitive to the possible constants of X and describe both the rise and redevelopment of the pattern. He will compare his results to the rather unexpected

conclusions from a similar investigation of Swedish by Delsing (1999). SMK has excellent qualifications for this project based on his Ph.D. thesis.

4.3. Ph.D. Peter Juul Nielsen (assistant professor at Roskilde University): **From syntagmatic extensions to paradigmatic contrasts.** The focus will be on the development of the semantics of the indirect object construction. The medieval construction persists into relatively modern times: 18th century grammarian Jens Høysgaard lists forms like *han åbnede mig døren* (lit. he opened me the door), and thus, the data of this subproject will also include texts and grammars from the period 1525-1850. Modern Danish demands a prepositional construction here, and the indirect object is found mainly in examples denoting change. The optionality of the FIO raises the question whether such optional extensions form paradigmatic oppositions, and, if so, under what circumstances?

In a revised monograph (forthcoming, accepted for publication by Brill), PJN has worked intensively on fundamental issues of morphological analysis. He argues that morphology is organised in general structures of dependency and constituency that can be applied beyond the limits of morphology. Therefore, these results provide a promising basis for the analysis of constructional relations.

5. Testing hypotheses

Given the assumption that word order syntax and constructional syntax are to a large extent organised paradigmatically, how far does the resemblance to morphology extend?

(A) Concerning markedness: We assume that the concept of markedness can be systematically included in the description of paradigms, and if speakers form the grammar of their native language as a structure of asymmetric oppositions of marked and unmarked members, this should be taken as a reflection of a general cognitive principle of conceptualisation, cf. Andersen (2001: 24-37).

Given that morphological systems change in patterns that can be described as systematic markedness changes (Timberlake 1977, Andersen 2001)¹, the hypothesis to be tested both in general and in subprojects (2-3) is that **constructional oppositions and word order oppositions articulate synchronically in oppositions of markedness, and that they will undergo changes that can be described in terms of markedness changes.** Since markedness is at one level a question of the relations between signs, answering (A) presupposes an answer to (B).

(B): What is the **language specific semantic** articulation of the relevant paradigm? And how do we distinguish this level of analysis from the level of cognitive structure found in, for instance, semantic maps? Morphology is the logical starting point, and it makes sense to ask question (C):

¹ We are well aware that markedness is a controversial notion. Our reference is Andersen 2001. For an example in Danish, see Heltoft 2005.

(C) What are the syntagmatic similarities and differences between MD morphological paradigms and constructional and topological paradigms? Are there any non-trivial analogues involved in the changes they undergo? The question of complex paradigmatic structure and change is added as (D).

(D) To what extent does the MD scenario document connection of paradigms into complex structures? Do we find examples of how paradigms unite and split in the course of history to form or dismantle complex paradigmatic structures?

6. Sources

The extant text corpus of MD is linguistically heterogeneous. East of the Sound, the archaic Scanic language prevails; to the west, tradition speaks of Jutish and Zealandic dialects on the basis of archaisms found in legal texts. In our context, we shall simply speak of Western Danish (WD).

A: Morphology and syntax of Eastern Danish (Scanic)

To achieve the broadest possible range of data, we will use 14th century texts as our empirical basis. These comprise the ms. E don. var. 136, 4^o (Rantzau's ms. of the Scanic Law etc.) and two extant fragments of the Danish *Consolatio Animae*: Uppsala C 529 and Stockholm A 109. Rantzau's ms. contains the largest number of texts of certain Scanic-Danish origin. The two manuscripts are available in facsimile in the *Corpus Codicum Danicorum* (CCD), vol. VI, some 250 pages:

The Scanic Law, the Scanic Ecclesiastical Law, the Scanic Book of Heritage and Lawsuits beyond negotiated settlements, Valdemar II's statutes forbidding the ordeal by fire, two statutes by King Eric Klipping, a text on King Canute's *huskarla* law, the statutes of the town of Lund and the *Consolatio Animae*.

These texts will be compared to three older mss. of the Scanic Law complex, namely Stockholm B 74, 2. part (oldest ms. in Danish), GkS 3121 (sister ms. of B 74, 2. part) and B 69, shown by Jensen (2011) to be more archaic than B 74 where the use of case is concerned.

B: Morphology and syntax of Western Danish (Jutish and Zealandic)

The WD tradition is more comprehensive than the Scanic both with respect to the number of texts and the number of genres represented. In addition to the legal genres, we find from around 1300 onwards medical handbooks and fragments of religious literature. In WD, the morphological innovations have developed much further than in Scanic, and no similarly archaic stage has been preserved. The primary sources comprise some 500 pages, all from the 15th century, but whenever possible, comparison will be made with parallel texts from around 1300.

the Jutish Law (Ribe ms.), Zealandic Ecclesiastical Law C 69, Valdemar's Law C 69, Medical Handbook AM 187, Lucidarius (AM 76,8), Holy Ladies (Stockholm K 4), the Stone Book of ms. K4, MD chronicles (The versions of the annals of the Ryd Monastery, the Chronicle in ms. K 46), the Travels of Mandeville.

Control texts from the early 1300s: Jutish Law C 37 (1284), Valdemar's Law AM 24,4; Valdemar's Law AM 455,12; Harpestreng; Fragments of religious texts from the 14th century.

7. Background, cooperation, and output

The CG results have been presented at a number of international conferences and have generated substantial interest and discussion. Contacts will now be renewed with historical linguists of different schools, including American functionalists: E. Traugott (Stanford), J. Klausenburger (Seattle); European researchers holding views differing, to some extent, from our own: G. Trousdale (Edinburgh), R. Waltereit (Newcastle), S. Luraghi (Pavia), A. Holvoet (Vilnius), G. Diewald and U. Detges (Munich), J.T. Faarlund and J.O. Askedal (Oslo), Dag Haug (Oslo), Lars-Olof Delsing (Lund) and researchers with views closer to our structural-functional point of departure: H. Andersen (UCLA), B. Joseph (Ohio), as well as linguists from the Danish Functional Linguistics research network. The project group will join the originally Swedish project *Syntaxhistoriskt nätverk* and offer to organise its 2017 meeting; in late 2018 an international seminar will be held on paradigmatic structure and language change.

National contacts of importance to the project include linguists from the University of Copenhagen (T. Christensen, E. Skafte Jensen, P. Harder, K. Boye, F. Gregersen) and Roskilde University (H. Haberland).

One output of the project will be a monograph on the development of word order in Danish and its paradigmatic organisation, authored by Lars Heltoft. The post-doc researchers will write separate peer-reviewed articles or monographs, and third, an international volume of critical seminar inputs will be edited.

The project head will be responsible for regular project meetings of three types:

- a. Internal meetings for project participants. These will be presentations, state-of-the-art reports and discussions.
- b. Masterclass or symposium style meetings with invited opponents, to develop and challenge the basic assumptions of the project.
- c. Open seminars, national and international, with guest lecturers from Denmark and abroad.

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