

THE INFLUENCE OF GENRE ON SYNTAX

Case studies in Middle Low German

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BACKGROUND

- choice of texts / corpus determines what we can know about older stages of a language
- Middle Low German (MLG): comparatively rich attestation
 - 1 legal texts (city statutes, land property rights, inheritance rights)
 - 2 charters and administrative texts (correspondences, bills, accounting books)
 - 3 (religious) literature (prose; poetry)
 - 4 letters (private, business)
 - 5 chronicles
- Peters (2003), Fedders (1988: 61-2): relativ large distance between written and spoken MLG (based on spelling, morphology and lexical choices) – what about syntax?
- What properties are **typical** of the syntax of MLG?

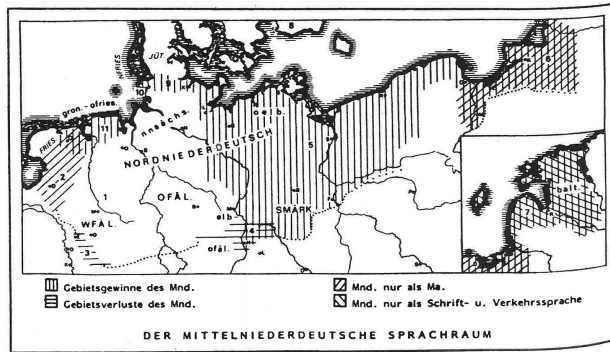
THIS TALK

I will:

- 1 look at the distribution of several **syntactic phenomena** in a corpus of MLG texts
 - null pronominal arguments
 - 1 referential null subjects
 - 2 (null) resumptive pronouns in non-restrictive relative clauses (NRRCs)
 - double agreement
 - verb placement
- 2 show that **genre** (besides time and scribal dialect) significantly influences the realisation of these phenomena
- 3 speculate about what we can know about MLG syntax at all

MIDDLE LOW GERMAN

- group of West Germanic dialects north of Benrath isogloss (no High German sound shift; i.e. *water, dorp, maken*)



- written in several scribal dialects (*Schreibtsprachen*) between ca. 1250 and 1650; international influence (Hanseatic League); replaced by ENHG as written language from 1550 onwards

THE CHLG

- CHLG (Ghent, Cambridge, Manchester/Konstanz) funded by Belgian Hercules foundation 2014-18 (grant AUG/13/02); collaboration with ReN (<https://vs1.corpora.uni-hamburg.de/ren/>; DFG-funded @ Hamburg/Münster) on POS- and morphology tagging
- incl. HeliPaD (Walkden 2016)
- development of tools: POS-tagger (Koleva et al. 2017), chunker; automated parser under development
- Goal: balanced and representative corpus
- ↔ non-translated, dated texts of different genres, sub-periods, and *Schreibtsprachen*
- ↔ representative picture of the language *written* from 1250 until 1600
- several preliminary case studies within the project; [this talk](#): what can be known about spoken MLG and how can differences between genres help us find out?

NULL PRONOMINAL ARGUMENTS

Referential null subjects

- Farasyn & Breitbarth (2016): MLG = partial null subject language (pro-drop under certain conditions)
- **linguistic factors**: preference for
 - main clauses
 - 2nd and 3rd person

(1) a. *Se gingen henin myt groten wunder des volkes vnde [∅] vunden de iukfrowe schaffen in deme huseken Vnde [pro] erschrak sere van deme virgin work in the house.DIM and [she] got.frightened much by the seltzen gaste. strange visitor (Hamburg, *Griseldis*, 1502)*

b. *v(m)me vns to verlose(n) heuest [pro] willen anneme(n) vnse krancheit [...] for us to relieve have [you] want.IPP on-take our disease*

(Münster, *Dat myrren bundeken*, 1480)

NULL PRONOMINAL ARGUMENTS

Referential null subjects

- also **extra-linguistic** factors:
 - **period** of writing (more common between 1450 and 1550)
 - scribal **dialect** (more often in Eastphalian, almost absent in Lübeck)
- strongest extra-linguistic factor predicting the presence of RNS in MLG: **genre**

genre	log odds	odds	factor weight	N	% RNS
chronicle	1.475	0.075	0.814	425	7.53
letter	0.428	0.028	0.605	216	2.78
religious	0.208	0.022	0.552	1249	2.24
literature	0.074	0.020	0.518	1882	1.97
legal	-0.403	0.012	0.400	1709	1.30
charters	-1.782	0.003	0.144	320	0.69

NULL PRONOMINAL ARGUMENTS

Referential null subjects

- genre additionally is a very strong predictor of the **type of RNS** that is found in the text
- Farasyn & Breitbarth (2016): two types of RNS in MLG (~ Weiß 2005, Volodina & Weiß 2014);
 - 1 null topics in SpecCP
 - 2 null Wackernagel clitics
- narrative texts: (much) more RNS in SpecCP ← emerging discourse drop

(2) *Vnd in der ersten stunde des dages mackede got Adame van der erde na*
 and in the first hour of-the day made god Adam from the earth to
synem likenisse [...] vnd [∅] sande one in dat Paradis dar mackede he Eua
 his image and [he] sent him in the paradise there made he Eve
van Adames ribbe In der dridden stunde des dages die wile dat he sleyp
 from Adam's rib in the third hour of-the day the while that he slept
vnd [∅] gaff eua adame to wiue vnd [pro] scholde ewich leuen vnde [pro/∅]
 and [he] gave Eve Adam to wife and [he] should forever live and [he]
vorbot one frucht an eynem bome to eten
 forbade him fruit from one tree to eat (Cronecken der Sassen, 1492)

NULL PRONOMINAL ARGUMENTS

Resumptive pronouns in NRRCs

- Non-restrictive relative clauses with 1st/2nd person head: in principle three possible agreement patterns (Ito & Mester 2009, Trutkowski & Weiß 2016):

(3) a. **Du, der** mein Bruder **bist**, ... (HN)
 b. **Du, der** mein Bruder **ist**, ... (RP)
 c. **Du, der du** mein Bruder **bist**, ... (ResP)
 'you who is/are my brother'

NULL PRONOMINAL ARGUMENTS

Resumptive pronouns in NRRCs

- MLG: only HN or ResP

(4) a. *dat=tu mijn vader woldest wesen de mijn schepper bist.*
 that=you my father would be who my creator are.2SG
 (Münster, *Dat myrren bundeken*, 1480)

b. *meer warhen sal ick van dy vlein de du allerwegen Jegenwordich byst*
 but where.to shall I from you flee REL you everywhere present are.2SG
 (Münster, *Ey(n) Jnnige clage to gode*, 1480)

- analysis: all is ResP-agreement; (null) resumptive in Wackernagel position mediates the agreement (*de* is underspecified for person and number)

NULL PRONOMINAL ARGUMENTS

Resumptive pronouns in NRRCs

- influenced by genre: **religious** texts or **letters** not only have more 1st/2nd person NRRCs, they also have more apparent HN-agreement / null resumptives in them

genre	log odds	odds	factor	N
religious	7.133	0.013	0.814	2221
letter	6.212	0.004	0.605	273
literature	4.995	0.001	0.552	3216
legal	3.724	0.000	0.518	2158
chronicle	-10.900	0.000	0.400	1002
charters	-11.165	0.000	0.144	1360

DOUBLE AGREEMENT

- MLG: *Einheitsplural*: same ending (either *-et* or *-en*; variation) for all persons in the plural
- but MLG had **Double (=position-dependent) Agreement**: in inversion: reduction of *-et* or *-en* to *-e*
- originally probably phonological (assimilation in 2PL.SBJN), but by MLG times spellout of participant features within prosodic phrase (cf. Ackema & Neeleman 2003)
- position of gap in conjunction reduction?

(5) *Vortmer, bidde wi vnde manen alle guode lude, Houeman, vnde husman Dat*
 furthermore, pray we and demand all good people, nobleman, and peasant that
se alle mit eneme schrichte volghen...
 they all with a complaint follow (Lübeck, *Urkundenbuch Lübeck*, 1334)

- **genre**: DA with 1PL much more common in **charters**, with 2PL in **religious** texts

VERB POSITION

- Mähl (2014): substantial variation (across texts/genres) regarding the word order in verb clusters, but

- 1 diachronic trend $V_1-V_2 > V_2-V_1$ in dependent clauses
- 2 diachronic trend towards full sentential bracket (reduction of extraposition)

Dependent clauses (based on Mähl 2014)

	full	partial	'distance'	Total
13/14 th c.	1590 (61%)	899 (34%)	127 (5%)	2616
15 th c.	1674 (65%)	726 (28%)	157 (6%)	2557
16 th c.	416 (77%)	98 (18%)	27 (5%)	541

- 'Distanzstellung': not (necessarily) embedded V2; \pm VPR

(6) *wente dat ik di mit my mach in mynes vaders lant voren*
 until that I you with me may in my father's land lead

(Troye 87,36-88,1, after Mähl 2014:93)

VERB POSITION

- Petrova (2012): MLG had

- 1 head-final VP
- 2 V(P)R (possible) and extraposition (pragmatically conditioned)
- 3 V-movement to C (also in 'transparent' subclauses under certain verbs)

(7) *Ick hebbe juw [...] ghesecht, dat unse leve here is eyn hovet aller*
 I have you.2PL.DAT told that our dear Lord is only head all.GEN
cristenen menschen
 Christian people (JV 9, 25)

VERB POSITION

- some clauses can't be subsumed under Petrova's 'limited V2' (not transparent subclauses), many are ambiguous between V(P)R+extraposition and head-initial TP.

- head-initial TP? (possible under FOFC; Biberauer et al. 2007)

Pintzuk 1991: estimation possible with sufficient data, without: head-initial TP = more economical than V(P)R + extraposition)

(8) a. *also dat he schal ledich syn aller anlaghe van eghenschap.*
 so that he shall free be all.GEN claim of ownership

(Herford, *Rechtsbuch*, c. 1375)

b. *Item wy bekennen dat Arnd westual hefft gesettet [syn hus] [to bewaringe]*
 also we declare that Arnd Westfal has set his house to pledge
[henningh brande Hans Soren Hans Stormere vnde Arnd Alberdes] [vor dat
 Henningh Brand Hans Soren Hans Stormer and Arnd Alberd for that
loffte]
 promise (Schwerin, *Stadtbuch*, 136-1500)

VERB POSITION

- subcorpus of 11 texts: V(P)R and genre are strong predictors of ambiguous head-initial/final TP, *Schreibsprache* much less (though Westphalian legal texts have with 18.2% double as many ambiguous cases as legal texts from other scribal dialects)

	log odds	odds	factor weight	N	% amb.
V(P)R	1.734	0.234	0.85	124	33.7
no V(P)R	-1.734	0.009	0.15	232	0.0
legal	0.616	0.124	0.649	201	12.4
prose	-0.616	0.039	0.351	155	3.9
WF	0.161	0.106	0.54	170	10.6
NN	-0.075	0.055	0.481	110	5.5
NL	-0.086	0.092	0.479	76	9.2

WHAT CAN WE KNOW?

- summary of preliminary studies discussed:

<i>phenomenon</i>	<i>preferred genre</i>
RNS	chronicles / narrative texts
(null) resumption in 1st/2nd ps. NRRCs	religious texts
double agreement	1PL in charters, 2PL in religious texts
ambiguous head-initial TP	charters/ legal texts
- What of this is genuine MLG?
 - Farasyn et al. (2016): comparison of existing studies on MLG syntax with syntactic phenomena found in MLG psalm translations (14th & 15th c.):
 - same types of RNS, but fewer than in non-translated texts
 - verb placement: much more 'conservative' w.r.t. diachronic trend (more $V_1 > V_1$ and (V(P)R +) extraposition for longer)
 - clear contact syntax like extraposition of weak pronouns (never in untranslated MLG texts)

(9) *Min sile sal leuen ande louen dic*
my sould shall live and praise you

Viuet aīa mea & laudabit te

(Ps. 119: 175)

WHAT CAN WE KNOW?

Conclusions

- RNS probably be genuine MLG:
 - untranslated texts, least frequently in formulaic texts like charters/ legal texts
 - Latin is a different kind of NSL; avoidance?
- verb position:
 - probably underlyingly (mostly) head-final TP; V(P)R + extraposition
 - exceptions in psalms: Latin influence; more extraposition in charters / legal texts: information structuring device
 - V(P)R: unclear what it says about the position of T, not necessarily movment
- double agreement:
 - probably genuine MLG syntax; \pm exceptionless throughout the period.
 - genre / person: not independent (same for (null) resumptives in 1st/2nd person NRRCs)

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THANK YOU!

