WEST MIDLAND AND SOUTHWESTERN ADJECTIVAL SYSTEMS IN EARLY MIDDLE ENGLISH: A REANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to present the process of functional reanalysis that took place in the adjectival systems of West Midland and Southwestern dialects. The process is manifested in the interplay between case and gender marking, which is regarded as an intermediate stage in the process of adjectival disintegration in Early Middle English. It is demonstrated that the formerly gender specific inflectional endings were reanalyzed to serve new functions as case markers in the aforementioned dialectal areas. An investigation into the dialectal distribution of the process reveals that prior to the loss of case and gender marking in West Midland and Southwestern dialects gender specific endings were reinterpreted to serve case functions.

1. Aims of the study

The aim of this paper is to present the process of functional reanalysis that took place in the adjectival systems of West Midland and Southwestern dialects. This process is manifested in the interplay between case and gender marking, which will be regarded as an intermediate stage in the process of adjectival disintegration in Early Middle English. It will be demonstrated that the formerly gender specific inflectional endings were reanalyzed to serve new functions as case markers in the aforementioned dialectal areas. The stimulus for the present study stems from the oversimplified presentation of the adjectival disintegration process in previous literature. It is generally acknowledged that the relatively sophisticated inflectional system of Old English adjectives was drastically simplified in transition to the Middle English period. For instance, Wełna (1996), among others, points to the fact that in Middle English "as a consequence of changes shared with nouns, first of all the reduction of unaccented syllables and analogical leveling, the five-case system of adjectives became extensively simplified" (Wełna 1996: 93). Another standard observation regarding the disinte-

gration of the adjectival system is the retention of a few relic inflections in the dialects of the South and Midlands. For instance, Fisiak (1968 [1996]: 78) remarks that:

> At the start of Middle English some traces of older adjectival inflection can be found in the Southern and Midland dialects, as {-ne} in *alc-ne* acc. 'each', {-re} in *āge-re* gen.-dat. 'own', {-re} in *al-re* gen.pl. 'all', and {-en} for all cases and genders except the nominative singular, as in *halēch-en* 'holy'.

It appears that standard accounts of the process distinguish merely one stage in the loss of adjectival inflectional markers, namely the shift from the richly inflected system inherited from Old English to the highly invariable system of Middle English with some relic forms preserved in some dialects. However, an investigation into the dialectal distribution of the process reveals that prior to the loss of case and gender marking in West Midland and Southwestern dialects gender specific endings were reinterpreted to serve case functions.

2. The data

The data for the present study comes from texts of West Midland and Southwestern provenance. The reason for such a choice was the condition of the adjectival system in those dialects. In both dialectal areas the EME adjectival system still preserved a large portion of the older inflectional markers, which could provide input for the process of reanalysis. In East Midland texts the adjectival system is already reduced to such an extent that the gender specific markers are largely absent. For instance, Allen (1995: 213) postulated the complete loss of the category of the dative in the *Ormulum*, a category in which gender distinctive endings were used for the feminine in Old English. Yet another East Midland text, the *Peterborough Chronicle*, is devoid of any gender marking as observed by Clark (1957: 113), or Allen (1995: 183). The work of Öfverberg (1924), who conducted a detailed analysis of the adjectival forms in the texts of the East Midland area, confirms the lack of adjectival gender marking. The remaining dialecs are poorly represented in the textual material. Thus, the corpus selected for the present study consists of the following texts:

West Midland:
- *Hali Meiðhad, St. Juliana, Sawles Warde* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 34)
- *Laȝamon Brut A* (London, British Library, Cotton Caligula A IX)

Southwestern:
- *The Benedictine Rule* (London, British Library, Cotton Claudius D III)
- *Laȝamon Brut B* (London, British Library, Cotton Otho C XIII)

3. West Midland adjectival system: A reanalysis

The West Midland dialect is represented in this study by two sources: the *Katherine group* and *Laȝamon Brut A*. *Katherine group* is composed of five texts: *Seinte Juliene, Seinte Marherete, Seinte Katerine, Sawles Warde* and *Hali Meiðhad* (Bately 1988: 55). Of these five texts three constitute the basis for investigation in this study: *Seinte Juliene, Sawles Warde*, and *Hali Meiðhad*. The adjectival gender system of the *Katherine group* is highly depleted. Consequently, there is no input for the process of reanalysis in this group of texts. However, another West Midland source, *Laȝamon Brut A*, provides evidence of the process discussed in the present paper due to its relatively archaic character. The archaicizing tendencies in *Laȝamon Brut A* were pointed out by previous scholars (Stanley 1969). Among the signs of the archaic character of this text is the preservation of the adjectival strong/weak opposition. For instance, Burrow (1996: 30) claims that the declensional distinctions were preserved in this text. Similar observations were made by Lass (1992). Lass claimed a two stage restructuring, which in early texts was evidenced by inconsistent use of inflectional relics, and in later ones by the collapse of the strong/weak opposition (Lass 1992: 115). Milroy (1984: 10) with reference to *Laȝamon Brut A* in general states that it displays a number of conservative features such as inflection and grammatical gender preserved in a healthy condition. The Old English gender marker –re survived in this text in the dative singular forms. The dative singular feminine ending in the form of /rə/ is used in 50% of the contexts where the feminine noun was modified.

1) [Page 98]
and ȝif þu wult al þis lond; nimen to þire aȝere hond.
we wulleð mid þe uehten; mid *f((u))llere strenðen*.
and Caric of-slæn and alle his cnihtes flan;

2) [Page 90]
Normandie and France; bi-wunnen mid fehte.
þreo & þritti kine-lond; ich halde a mire *aȝere hond*.
þæ ȝe hit under sunnen; habbeoð me bi-wunnen.

3) [Page 60]
þæ cnihtes mid weope; þene king awehten.
& heo him to cleopeden; mid *mildere steuene*.
Lauerd hu mid þe; hu beoð þine beo[r]ste.

All of the modified nouns in the examples above were assigned feminine gender. However, the same ending occurs with Old English masculine and neuter nouns as well.

4) [Page 18]
     Blisse was on hirede. þeo Brennes þis mæide nom.
     mid *muchelere wurhschipe*; he wunede mid þan ducke.
     þa þat forme ȝer; wharð forð igan.

The modification of the originally masculine noun *wurhschipe* stands in contrast to the Old English rules of gender assignment on the adjectival inflectional endings. Thus, this extended use of the marker may as well be interpreted as an instance of reanalysis.

The preservation of the adjectival grammatical gender in *Laȝamon Brut A* was emphasized by a number of previous scholars (Milroy 1984, Clark 1957). However, the authors of these studies failed to notice that these gender specific markers were extended to serve as markers of the case rather than the gender function.

4. Southwestern adjectival system: A reanalysis

The gender system of the *Benedictine Rule* seems unstable. Confusion in gender assignment of the adjectival forms appears abundant. Strong singular genitive adjectives modifying feminine nouns generally use the expected /rə/ inflection.

5) [121.25]
     CLEOPIAÞ NUNNE ODÐE OFFESTRE.
     Gyf hwylc abbodesse odðe ænig ealdor of *haligre ende-
     byrdnisse* gewilnad, þæt me hi on mynecene mynstre underfo...

6) [45.4]
     sæte for awyrþnesse þare halige þreomnesse. æfter þan ut-
     sangan reden mæn þa becc *godcundre lare* ægþor ge of þare
     ealdon æ, ge of þare nywe, and eac heore trahtes, þe namcuþe...

However, the same /rə/ ending appears modifying the originally neuter noun *mæȝen*.

7) [147.18]
     awriten is, to anginne godre drohtnunge, and swa æt nyxtan þurh
     Godes fultum þu cymst to mare geþinðe *godre magne* and lare
     þære halgene, þe we bufe embe spece, þæt a gewurðe ece lif to
     magne...

Adjectives in the strong dative singular contexts generally display gender agreement with the modified feminine noun. The historically expected /rə/ inflection appears in the majority of the singular dative feminine contexts:

8) [31.1]
     gyf hwet to axsyenne sy, þat beo þonne geaxsod of þare ealdre
     mid *ealre eadmodnysse* and underþidnisse and mycelre arwyrþnysse,
     læste heo mare spæce, þenne hit fremye. Gabbunge oddo...

The use of the ending /rə/ appears to be extended to the entire case, as this inflection is present when adjectives modify masculine and neuter nouns as well. This is best illustrated by the examples below, where the noun in example (9) was originally masculine and the one in (10) was neuter:

9) [123.5]
     ne gedyrstlæce heo nane þenunge to begynnen, bute þære abbo-
     desse hese. Sy heo æfre geare to *ælcere steore* be regoles
     tecinge, and swa mycle ma heo eowige edmodnesse and gode...

10) [5.23]
     us liues wegas ætyweð. We eornestlice mid clennesse modes
     and lichaman and mid geleafan and *godre werce* bigenge and mid ha-
     ligra mægene heuene his wegas geornlice faren and geernian, þæt...

In *Laȝamon Brut B* lack of historical gender congruence is at times observed in the forms with the strong dative singular feminine ending /rə/. This ending is indeed found in the strong singular dative feminine positions:

11) [Page 307]
     Al ȝeode þes read; ase þe king hadde ised.
     and Cona(n þa)r-to heold mid *heȝere strengþe*.
     And þe king wende forþ in toward France.

12) [Page 345]
     Vortiger þis iseh; and he to þan kinge beh.
     mid *mildere speche*; he gan his louerd grete.
     Hayl beo þou Constance; Bruttene louerd.

13) [Page 227]
     and mochel of his folke floȝen mid þan kinge.
     and asteȝe þane hul; mid *mochelere sorewe*.
     noþeles þar vp þronge; niȝentene þusend.

However, its use is extended beyond the bounds of the feminine nouns modification. The /rə/ was also recorded with a originally neuter noun.

14) [Page 345]
     Her beoþ chepmen icome; of oþer londe alse hit his wone.

Hii habbeþ me itold. wiþ *soþere spelle*
þat þe king of Norweie; neuwenliche wole hider fare.

One interpretation of such usage is that the function of the older ending was confused and it was used indiscriminately with masculine and neuter nouns as well. Another possible explanation is the functional reanalysis of the older gender marker. The theory of reanalysis appears to explain the situation observed in this context.

5. Summary

Table 1. Reanalysis in West Midland and Southwestern texts

GENDER	West Midland		Southwestern	
	KG	La3 A	BR	La3 B
fem. /rə/	–	RNL	RNL	RNL

*/RNL- reanalysis

The analysis of the textual material revealed that West Midland and Southwestern texts seemingly display a degree of confusion in the usage of the feminine /rə/ ending. However, this confusion might be reinterpreted as a case of reanalysis. The preservation of this gender specific ending in West Midland and Southwestern dialects and its use throughout the entire case could find its explanation in the reanalysis suggested by Jones (1988).

To sum up, it can be postulated that there were two stages in the adjectival disintegration process. The first stage is the retention and analogical enforcement of phonetically strong endings, such as strong singular genitive /əs/, dative /rə/ and accusative /nə/ with the accompanying gradual loss of adjectival gender distinctions (Jakubowski 2001). The process of reanalysis, as suggested by Jones (1988) was at work at this stage, which suggests a tendency to retain the older adjectival case system categories. This stage is followed by the loss of distinctive endings and the development of the adjectival inflection system based on the /ə/~/Ø/ opposition with the accompanying gradual loss of adjectival case distinctions. It is likely that the system found in *La3amon Brut A* is still at the first stage of disintegration and therefore displays such unexpected inflectional diversity and archaic adjectival inflection features (Jones 1988). The older case and gender distinctive markers underwent the process of reanalysis in this text to perform the case functions at the expense of gender distinctions (as suggested by Jones 1988).

In view of the complexity observed in the adjectival system disintegration it can be concluded that the accounts of adjectival disintegration in previous literature present a very simplified picture. These studies focus on the second stage of adjectival simplification suggested here, disregarding the first stage crucial to the understanding of the process.

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