

# Deletion of $\varphi$ Ps in Old Norwegian

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In this paper I propose a new analysis of null arguments in Old Norwegian (ON), a lesser studied early Northwest Germanic variety. I shall argue that the distribution of ON null arguments indicate that deletion in the sense of Roberts (2010) is at work.

ON exhibits many of the properties typically found in partial null argument languages (NALs) (e.g. Holmberg 2010 and Walkden 2014, 213): It has generic null subjects, and allows objects to be null in addition to subjects. Moreover, null arguments only occur in certain contexts: ON null arguments are practically always 3rd person.<sup>1</sup> This distinguishes ON from a partial NAL like Finnish, where 1st and 2nd person null subjects, but not 3rd person ones, occur freely (Holmberg, 2010), and makes it resemble other early Northwest Germanic languages, which also display a preference for 3rd person null arguments (Walkden, 2014, 211–212).

I shall account for the person asymmetry in ON by combining Déchaine and Wiltschko's (D&W's) (2002) work on pronouns with Roberts' (2010) mechanism of deletion. D&W distinguish between  $\varphi$ P and DP pronouns. The difference between  $\varphi$ Ps and DPs is the presence of a D-feature in the latter, which adds a D-layer that makes the pronoun "demonstrably definite" and enables it to function as a determiner with a noun complement (D&W, 410–411). In ON 1st and 2nd person pronouns seem to be DPs, whereas 3rd person pronouns are  $\varphi$ Ps. The distinction is evidenced by determiner-like properties exhibited by 1st and 2nd person pronouns only: 1st and 2nd person pronouns can take nouns as complements, as in (1). 3rd person pronouns do not take noun complements; if they co-occur with nouns, these nouns function as appositions (Faarlund, 2004, 89–90).

- (1) a. ... *At ver dællir æigum oss ny guð.*  
... that we dalesmen get ourselves new god  
'... that we dalesmen have a new god.' (The Legendary Saga of St. Óláfr, 7266)
- b. ... *með þui at þit felagar kalleð guð ykcan sva margar iartæignir*  
... with that that you fellows call god your so many wonders  
*gera*  
do  
'... since you fellows say that your god performs so many wonders.' (The Legendary Saga of St. Óláfr, 7377)

On Roberts' (2010) analysis pronouns whose features are properly included in the features of a Probe may be deleted. I shall argue that in ON, the presence of the D-feature not only enables

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<sup>1</sup>I base this claim on data from the Menotec corpus, [http://www.edd.uio.no:3000/users/sign\\_in](http://www.edd.uio.no:3000/users/sign_in), as well as the observations of Nygaard (1893).

1st and 2nd person pronouns to function as determiners; it also prevents deletion because DPs are structurally too big to fulfil the requirement of proper inclusion.<sup>2</sup>

Diachronic evidence in favour of the analysis comes from Modern Norwegian (MN). MN in general does not allow null arguments. Interestingly, the status of 3rd person pronouns also has changed: 3rd person pronouns now exhibit DP properties, and the category  $\varphi$ P thus seems to be lost. This is evidenced by the ability of the 3rd person pronouns *han* 'he' and *hun* 'she' to function as psychologically distal demonstratives (PDDs), as well as preproprial articles, neither of which is found in ON (Johannessen 2008, Dahl 2007). The PDD is typically used to point out a person that either the speaker or the addressee does not know, as *Mikkel* in (2).

- (2) *jeg og Magne vi sykla jo og han Mikkel da*  
I and Magne we cycled yes and he Mikkel then  
'I and Magne and that guy Mikkel we cycled then.' (NoTa, Johannessen 2008)

Since only  $\varphi$ Ps could be deleted in ON, the loss of this pronoun category entailed the loss of null subjects.

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<sup>2</sup>Unlike Håkansson's (2013) analysis of Old Swedish null subjects, my analysis straightforwardly predicts the virtual non-existence of 1st and 2nd person null subjects. As opposed to Walkden (2014), I do not rely on the assumption that null subjects must be aboutness topics; this is an advantage because ON null subjects occur in contexts where an aboutness topic reading is excluded, e.g. in non-subject relatives (Lambrecht, 1994, 130).