

Conjunct and Absolute Verb Inflexions in Scots and Northern English: Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives¹

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In this paper we examine a little-known and, from a Germanic perspective, highly peculiar feature of Middle Scots and northern Middle English morphosyntax, namely the employment of two distinct patterns of person and number marking on verbs in the present indicative with the distribution of the two patterns being determined by the syntactic environment of the verb. This system of verbal inflexion is abundantly attested in medieval and early modern texts from Scotland and the north of England and survived to some degree in traditional dialects of those areas into the 20th century. The data reported on in this paper is drawn from a survey we have made of a number of Middle Scots and Northern Middle English texts, ranging from the fourteenth century to the sixteenth century. We have included both poetry and prose in our corpus.

Although we ultimately hope to produce a study which gives equal weight to the synchronic and diachronic aspects of the inflexional system, our paper today will focus almost wholly upon the synchronic system, both because a careful exposition of the syntactic environment in which the opposition holds requires a fair amount of time, and because the diachronic factors are so complex, with consequences for many long-standing problems in the history of English, that we cannot do justice to them at the tail end of our allotted time today. We will present instead a preview of the next installment of work on this topic, which will focus upon the diachronic side of the problem.

The paper is divided into four sections. First, we give a more detailed description and more accurate formulation of the syntactic contexts in which the two conjugations appear than has hitherto been presented, with ample exemplification of as many person/number categories as possible for both Scots and Northern English. Second, we briefly review previous treatments of this inflexional opposition in Scots and Northern English. Third, we present our analysis of the conditions regulating the appearance of the two conjugations; in particular, we will show that the trigger for one of the two patterns is cliticization of the subject pronoun onto the verb. In the final section we sketch the key questions to be asked in a diachronic study of the development of this typologically un-Germanic phenomenon, considering both language-internal factors and the possibility of influence through language contact.

1. The conjunct/absolute opposition.

1.1. Distribution. We can state briefly the basic and uncontroversial facts of this phenomenon as follows. In the present indicative, second and third singular verb forms are always marked with the suffix *-s*, while for the other four persons, i.e., first singular, and first, second, and third

¹ We wish to dedicate this paper to the memory of our late colleague, Jim McCawley, for his love of all things Scots and all things syntactic.

plural, the inflexion of the individual verbal form is governed by its syntactic environment: if the verb is accompanied by an adjacent subject pronoun, it is uninflected, while in all other syntactic environments it receives the suffix *-s*. In effect, then, in the relevant dialects there are two patterns of inflexion, shown in (1) below.

(1) Conjunct vs. Absolute in the present indicative

| | Conjunct | | Absolute | |
|---|----------|-----|----------|-----|
| | sg. | pl. | sg. | pl. |
| 1 | -∅ | -∅ | -s | -s |
| 2 | -s | -∅ | -s | -s |
| 3 | -s | -∅ | -s | -s |

The first pattern of inflection, which is traditionally said to obtain when the appropriate subject pronoun is adjacent to its finite verb, and which is virtually identical with the pattern employed in standard modern English, we will refer to as the CONJUNCT inflexion. The second pattern, which is said to obtain in all circumstances in which the subject pronoun and its finite verb are not adjacent and which shows identical forms with suffixed *-s* for all person and number combinations, we will call the ABSOLUTE inflexion. In section 3 below we offer a different account of the factor which triggers conjunct inflexion, arguing that the subject pronoun is cliticized to the verb, not simply adjacent. But for the time being we will use the vocabulary of adjacency to describe the syntactic contexts in question.

The following examples illustrate the conjunct inflection for Middle Scots and for northern Middle English. Since second singular and third singular subjects invariably take *-s* on the verb, we will restrict our examples to the other four person and number combinations. First of all, note that a personal pronoun immediately to the left of the verb triggers the conjunct form—i.e., a zero ending—on the verb:

(2) MIDDLE SCOTS²

- a. And sa I hope I may say R723
'and so I hope I may say'
- b. We seik all nycht bot nathing can we find H71.2384
'we seek all night but we can find nothing'
- c. Ye speir, had I fre chois, gif I wald cheis better D35.52
'you ask, if I had free choice, if I would choose better'
- d. Thay say, I sall to Paris R200
'they say I shall [go] to Paris'

² Abbreviations for cited texts: (Middle Scots) B=*Barbour's Bruce*, D=Dunbar, H=Henryson, I=John of Ireland, J=lowland text by King James, in introduction to the *King's Quair*, L=Lindsay, *The Thrie Estaitis*, R=*The Tail of Rauf Colyear*; (Northern Middle English) M=*The Sege of Melayne*, Ro=Richard Rolle, T=*Towneley Plays*.

- (3) NORTHERN MIDDLE ENGLISH
- a. I rede ye praye yone clergy sesse M776
'I advise you to ask yon clergy to cease'
 - b. Than we slepe in dede Ro.12.1
'Then we sleep indeed'
 - c. ...That ye se hedirwarde drawe M1471
'that you see coming in this direction'
 - d. To heven thay ledeoure nobill knyghtis M322
'to heaven they lead our noble knights'

The conjunct form of the verb is also found when the subject is a personal pronoun immediately to the right of the verb:

- (4) MIDDLE SCOTS
- a. now se I na remeid H74.2466
'now I see no remedy'
 - b. Begin we to threip R130
'we begin to quarrel'
 - c. Quhy ly ye thus? H10.316
'Why do you lie thus?'
 - d. Quhat say thay of me in the toun? L2199
'What do they say of me in the town?'

- (5) NORTHERN MIDDLE ENGLISH
- a. A vowe to God make I here, M1187
'I make a vow to God here'
 - b. The soddane have we slayne M589
'We have slain the sultan'
 - c. Thus fourty thowsande hafe thay slayne M373
'thus they have slain 40,000'

Again, in all instances in (2)--(5), the verb takes a zero ending.

The absolute forms, ending invariably in *-s*, are used in all other contexts. We will here show examples of the specific contexts requiring the absolute forms. First of all, a lexical (i.e. non-pronominal) subject requires the absolute, as seen in the following 3rd person plural examples:

- (6) MIDDLE SCOTS
- a. men callis me Rauf Coilyear R44
'Men call me Rauf Coilyear'
 - b. Quhen freinds meits, harts warmis. L642
'When friends meet, hearts warm'
 - c. On to the ded gois all estatis,
Princis, prelotis, and potestatis D61.17-18
'On to the dead go all ranks,

- Princes, prelates, and rulers'
- d. And his menye sa neir vs lyis B114.77
'And his camp followers lie so near us'
- (7) NORTHERN MIDDLE ENGLISH
- a. The Sarazenes hase oure gude men slayne, M540
'The Saracens have slain our good men'
- b. il men feghtes noght bot ogynes God Ro.8.2
'evil men fight not but against God'
- c. Loo, yonder comes Sarazenes in the felde, M989
'Lo, yonder come Saracens in the field'
- d. Fyfty lordis ... hase loste bothe mayne and myghte M280-282
'Fifty lords have lost both main and might'

As seen above, the absolute forms are found with lexical NP subjects immediately to the left or the right of the verb, or when the subject is separated from the verb.

The clearest examples of lexical subjects are naturally in third person. A possible example of a lexical subject for non-third persons is the emphatic use of reflexive pronouns, as in the examples below.

- (8) MSC My self hes na lasair R634
'I myself have no leisure'
- (9) NME For yitt myselfe es saffe and sownde, M1370
'for yet I myself am safe and sound'

Perhaps a simpler explanation for such cases, however, would be to say that the subject is considered to have a head noun 'self', which is grammatically third person singular, triggering third person singular agreement on the verb.

Absolute forms are also used on the second and subsequent verbs of a conjoined verb phrase. (We have not found examples of conjoined verb phrases in which the subject is to the right.) We would like to draw particular attention to the second person plural form in (10c), as well as second person plural absolute forms in the later sets of examples, since such forms apparently did not occur in the Middle Scots corpus examined by Meurman-Solin 1992.

- (10) MIDDLE SCOTS
- a. I wryte all day, bot gets never ane plack! L3065
'I write all day but never get a fourpenny piece'
- b. We have grauntit & be this presentis lettres grauntis ... Jxxvi
'We have granted and by these present letters grant...'
- c. ye gang /With polkis to mylne, and beggis baith meill and schilling D81.74-5
'you go with bags to [the] mill and beg both meal and husks'
- d. thai betakin and signifyis I23.5
'they betoken and signify'
- e. thir wourdis sacramentale signifyis betakynnis and causis ... I9.18-9
'these sacramental words signify, betoken, and cause'

- (11) NORTHERN MIDDLE ENGLISH
- a. I ioy in the and sekys anely thine honoure, Ro.8.31
'I joy in thee and seek only thine honor'
 - b. All we lufe sum thyng, ... /And haves therin likyng, Ro.49.9-10
'we all love something, ... and have delight therein'
 - c. To heven thay ledeoure nobill knyghtis,
And comforthes tham with mayne and myghtis, M322-3
'To heaven they lead our noble knights,
and comfort them with main and might'

The distribution of absolute and conjunct verb forms in the examples of (10) and (11) tells us something interesting about the syntax of this construction. The presence of a pronoun subject affects only the verb it is immediately adjacent to in the string of words; the pronoun does not trigger conjunct agreement on the higher VP dominating the conjoined verb phrases, which would then percolate down to the verb in each daughter VP.

Absolute forms are also found in relative clauses if the missing constituent is the subject of the relative clause. To be as theory-neutral as possible, we will refer to these examples as 'subject-centered' relative clauses. In particular, we see no motivation for positing a trace or other empty NP standing in subject position of these constructions.

- (12) MIDDLE SCOTS
- a. Direct me fra this deid sa dolorus,
Quhilk gois thus withoutin gilt begild; H112.168-9
'direct me from this death so dolorous,
who [1sg.] goes thus without being beguiled by guilt'
 - b. Aganis us synnaris that servis to be schent! H138.37
'against us sinners that deserve to be destroyed'
 - c. Adew, ye craftie cordiners, That sellis the schone over deir, L4194-5
'adieu, you crafty shoemakers, that sell the shoes for too much'
 - d. thay quhilk clymmis up maist hie, H12.371
'they who climb up most high'
 - e. to thame that resauis bapteme I11.32
'to them that receive baptism'
- (13) NORTHERN MIDDLE ENGLISH
- a. The develis that tempis vs nyght and day Ro.12.58
'The devils that tempt us night and day'
 - b. All werthy men that luffes to here M1
'All worthy men that love to hear'
 - c. that day owre joy sal begyn, that here suffers pyne; Ro.39.21
'that day our joy shall begin, [we] who here suffer pain'

The absolute pattern is found as well in reduced relative clauses, as in the extraposed example below:

- (14) MSc Thair is mony better than I, cummis oft to Parys R432
'there are many better than I, [who] often come to Paris'

Subjectless constructions were possible in certain contexts in Middle Scots and northern Middle English. In all such constructions the verb appears in the absolute form. Both Meurman-Solin 1992 and Montgomery 1994 state that such forms are found only with first person singular, being especially common in the personal letters which each examined as part of their corpora. We would here like to offer examples of subjectless constructions occurring with a range of person/number combinations.

- (15) MIDDLE SCOTS
- a. Now faindis to haue fauour with thy fleichings, R902
'now [I] pretend to have favor with thy flattering promises,'
 - b. And yarnis mair than ony thing
Vengeans on yow, schir kyng, to tak, B209.20-1
'and [they] yearn to take vengeance on you, sir king, more than anything'
[friends warning Robert the Bruce against his enemies]
- (16) NORTHERN MIDDLE ENGLISH
- a. where art thou, Esau, my son?
-- here, fader, and askis youre benyson. T49.5-6
'Here, father, and [I] ask your blessing'
 - b. What, Charls, thinkis now to flee? M1314
'What, Charles, [do thou] intend now to flee?'
 - c. Sayse: 'I praye yow, all my cleregy here, ...' M923
[the bishop] says: 'I pray you, all my clergy here,'

Specifically, we find not only subjectless constructions understood as having a first person singular subject, as in (15a) and (16a), but also second person singular (16b), third person singular (16c), and third person plural (15b).

We do not list here an example of a subjectless construction with an understood second person plural subject, because we have not found an example which is unambiguously in the indicative mood. The situation with second person plural is complicated by the fact that second person plural imperatives themselves display traces of a conjunct/absolute distinction, with a zero ending if there is an adjacent expressed pronoun subject, and an -s ending if there is no pronoun, as illustrated in (17a and b) and (18a and b):

- (17) MIDDLE SCOTS
- a. Say ye amen for cheritie D100.58
'Say "amen" for charity'
 - b. Haffis gud day! B334.305
'Have a good day!'
 - c. Cry peip quhairever ye be! H10.308
'Cry "peep" wherever you may be!'
[city mouse to the country mouse]

- (18) NORTHERN MIDDLE ENGLISH
- a. And no Sarazene yee flee M354
'And don't flee any Saracen'
 - b. And sendis Rowlande to Lombardy... M202
'And send Roland to Lombardy'
 - c. Have gud day, Charls, M1458
'Have a good day, Charles'

The examples in (17a) and (18a) show a zero ending with an overt second person plural subject pronoun, the (b) examples show *-s* with no overt subject. However, the (c) examples in both (17) and (18) are counterexamples: there is no overt subject pronoun, and the verb has a zero ending. The pattern in (c) is extremely frequent in both Middle Scots and Northern Middle English. Since the use of absolute *-s* in the imperative is much less robust than its use in the present indicative, we will have nothing further to say about this opposition in our synchronic account. We believe, however, that this pattern in second person plural played an important role diachronically in the development of the indicative pattern, and we hope to treat this further in future work.

Returning now to indicative clauses in which the subject is an expressed personal pronoun, we find absolute forms used whenever the pronoun subject is separated from its verb by another constituent of the clause, such as an NP object, or an adverbial:

- (19) MIDDLE SCOTS
- a. As I befor has to yow tald B324.62
'as I have told to you before'
 - b. That ye sic substance dois posses D76.55
'that you do possess such substance'
 - c. As thay of lang tyme hes bene hantit to H24.788
'as they have been accustomed to for a long time'
 - d. ... that thai our possessioun
Haldis with strinth agane resoune B101.540-1
'that they hold our possession with strength against reason'

(We have not found examples of this construction in the Northern Middle English texts we have examined.)

The preceding set of examples illustrated pronoun subjects separated from their verbs by another constituent of the clause. Absolute verb inflexion also appears if the pronoun head of an NP is followed by a modifier, or by an appositive NP, or by a vocative. This pattern is abundantly attested in Middle Scots, and is seen as well in Northern Middle English.

- (20) MIDDLE SCOTS
- a. Sen we thrie seiks yon nobill king, L700
'since we three seek yon noble king'
 - b. Ye preistis hes grit prerogtyvis, L166.40
'you priests have great prerogatives'

- c. And ye, Schir Wolff, hes bene richt odious H36.1191
'and you, Sir Wolf, have been very odious'
- d. thai that contempnis to resaue it synnis richt grettie I18.20
'they that scorn to receive it sin very greatly'
- e. Quhen thai, on the othir half, has seyn B205.478
'when they, on the other half, have seen'
- f. For my Gaist and I baith cheueris with the chin R96
'for my guest and I both shiver with the [?]'

(21) NME I, youre son Esaw, bryngis you venyson. T50.22
'I, your son Esau, bring you venison'

1.2. *Some exceptions.* Before we conclude this descriptive overview, a few minor points should be noted. Not surprisingly, modal verbs such as *may* do not participate in the absolute/conjunct opposition. Modals appear in an invariant form regardless of the person, number, adjacency, or pronominal status of the subject.

Second, the present indicative forms of *be* generally resist the absolute/conjunct opposition. That is, the regular forms of *be* as listed in (22) below tend to be used in all contexts, whether there is an personal pronoun subject adjacent to the verb or not. If the forms of *be* were strictly following the absolute/conjunct opposition we would presumably expect to find the third person singular form *is* used in all the absolute contexts described in (6)-(21) above.

(22) Present indicative of *be*

| | sg. | pl. |
|---|-----|-------|
| 1 | am | ar(e) |
| 2 | art | ar(e) |
| 3 | is | ar(e) |

(23) MIDDLE SCOTS

- a. We that ar heir in hevins glory
To yow that ar in purgatory D98.1-2
'we that are here in heaven's glory
to you that are in purgatory'
- b. Am I nocht worthie till avance,
That am sa gude a page L453-4
'am I not worthy to advance, that am so good a page?'
- c. ye Sarayeins ar succuderus and self willit ay R912
'you Saracens are arrogant and self-willed always'
- d. Bot ye sa gracious ar D89.35
'but you are so gracious'
- e. Throughout all Christindome I have past,
And am cum heir, now at the last, L607-8
'I have passed throughout all Christendom
and have now come here at the last'

- f. his synnys ar put away I3.19
'his sins are put away'
 - g. We se that the sone and the mone ar gret I34.4
'we see that the sun and the moon are great'
- (24) NORTHERN MIDDLE ENGLISH
- a. Thies cursed wreches that are herein M455
'these cursed wretches that are herein'
 - b. Where are alle the nobill knyghtis ... M579
'where are all the noble knights?'
 - c. Yitt are we ten thowsande here
That are yitt bothe hole and fere M1433-34
'yet are we 10,000 here that are still both uninjured and sound'
 - d. My preistis are here M649
'my priests are here'

Looking at the Middle Scots examples, in (23a) we see two subject-centered relative clauses, the first with a 1st plural subject and the second with a 2nd plural subject; in both relative clauses the verb is *are*, not *is*; (23b) is similar, with a first person singular subject. In (21c) an appositive NP intervenes between the pronoun subject and the verb, but we get *are*, not *is* as the verb; likewise in (23d) the pronoun subject is separated from its verb by a predicate adjective but there is no effect on the form of the verb. In (23e) the form of the verb of the second verb phrase is *am*, even though it appears separated from the pronoun subject. In both (23f) and (23g) the subject is a lexical 3rd plural NP, which elsewhere would trigger an absolute form, but here the verb is *are*.

Having said that, however, we must point out that we do find a number of examples where even the forms of *be* are subject to the conditions of the absolute/conjunct opposition:

- (25) MIDDLE SCOTS
- a. quhen the natur and body is ordanit I4.9
'when the nature and body are ordained'
 - b. Now quhair is Placebo and Solace? L816
'now where are P. and S.?'
 - c. Baith myself and my horse is reddy R58
'both myself and my horse are ready'
 - d. the wourdis is caus instrumentale I10.1
'the words are [the] instrumental cause'
- (26) NORTHERN MIDDLE ENGLISH
- a. the Sarazenes that es alle heythynnesse within M1226
'the Saracens that are all heathenness within'
 - b. Myrth and lovyng is his warke T60.140
'mirth and loving are his work'

Note that (23g) and (25a) are syntactically identical—two singular lexical NPs co-ordinated to the left of the verb—in a text by the same author (John of Ireland), so that this seems to be an instance of free variation.

Two more peculiarities of the verb *be* will be mentioned here. First of all, we have found a few examples of *is* used with second person singular, as seen below in (27a) and (28a). The contexts for these examples are not ones in which we would expect an absolute form: the pronoun *thou* is immediately adjacent to the verb. Instead, these forms seem to reflect the old syncretism of second and third singular endings in the north, as seen already in Old Northumbrian.

(27) MIDDLE SCOTS

- a. Fy, puft-up pryde! Thow is full poysonabill! H18.593
'fie, puffed-up pride! Thou art full poisonous!'
- b. ... in faith, thow art ane schrew. H22.704
'in faith, thou art a rascal'

(28) NORTHERN MIDDLE ENGLISH

- a. And thou es 'heghand my heved' fra erthly luf... Ro.8.32
'and thou art raising my head from earthly love'
- b. Thow ert arely wakand oftsythe, Ro.76.109
'thou art often wakened early'

It should be stressed again, however, that the use of *is* with *thou* is quite rare; elsewhere the same authors regularly use *art* with *thou*, as seen in (27b) and (28b). We believe, however, that the use of *is* with *thou* is significant for our diachronic investigation, and will return to these examples in future work.

A final point concerning the verb *be* is that the absolute/conjunct opposition is found to a limited extent in the past tense forms of *was* and *were*. In other words, in the contexts we have identified as requiring absolute forms of present indicative verbs, one sometimes finds *was* used with plural subjects. The extension of the absolute/conjunct opposition here is clearly due to the fact that *be* is the only verb with overt number agreement in the past tense in these dialects.

(29) MIDDLE SCOTS

- a. He lay so still, the myis wes not effeird H43.1412
'He lay so still, the mice were not afraid'
- b. With mony Prelatis & Princis, that was of mekle pryde; R6
'with many prelates and princes that were of great pride'
- c. Than wes he and his lineage lost D24.101
'then were he and his lineage lost'
- d. quhair brandis was bricht, R131
'where logs were bright'

(30) NORTHERN MIDDLE ENGLISH

- a. And alle the bellis that in that abbaye was M515
'and all the bells that were in that abbey'
- b. All men was slayn thugh adam syn, T62.1
'all men were slain through Adam's sin'
- c. Blynded was his faire ene, Ro.43.41
'blinded were his fair eyes'

At this point we conclude our description of the syntactic contexts relevant for the conjunct/absolute opposition of verb inflection. We now turn to a brief overview of previous work on the topic before presenting our own analysis.

2. Previous accounts.

The split inflexion of the present indicative (and imperative) in Scots and northern English has long been noted and often briefly described in dialect grammars (e.g. Murray 1873), grammars of Middle English (e.g. Mossé 1952), and in the grammatical sketches accompanying Middle English and Scots anthologies and individual texts (e.g. Smith 1902, Bennett & Smithers 1968), but in the older literature the topic is never given any sustained attention, and in some cases the descriptions are quite inadequate.

For example, Bennett and Smithers say of the northern dialects of Middle English that

"In type C [i.e. Northern Middle English], in which *-es* was the ending (inherited from ONorthumbrian) of the 3 (as well as the 2) pres.sg. and the pl., an *-e* ending or an endingless form (a reduction of *-e*) was used when the subject of the verb was a pronoun. This is clearly because the plural of the personal pronoun was felt to be an adequate sign of plurality in the verb; ..." (Bennett & Smithers 1968:xxxvi)

This statement seems to exclude first person singular from the opposition, ignores the adjacency requirement between the pronoun subject and the verb, and offers a peculiar justification for this pattern. Why would the pronouns *we*, *ye*, and *they* contribute "an adequate sign of plurality" while a lexical NP such as *men* would not?

From a diachronic point of view, even less attention has been paid to this interesting phenomenon in Scots and Northern Middle English. Only very brief and rather superficial treatments of the possible history of the split conjugation have appeared. For example, Macafee 1992/1993, in a useful synchronic sketch of Older Scots, says in passing,

"It is unclear how this double system of concord arose. It seems to represent a balance between two simplifying tendencies—one is to generalise the *-is* ending throughout; the other is to eliminate present tense inflections entirely." (Macafee 1992/1993:21).

The split inflexion has, however, been recently discussed in some detail from a variationist point of view, especially as a feature of older Scots grammar, notably by Meurman-Solin 1992 and Montgomery 1994. These scholars have provided useful statistical breakdowns of the appearance of the two inflectional patterns in texts varying by genre and by time period; Meurman-Solin is additionally interested in the use of Southern Middle English *-th* endings for 3rd person singular in older Scots texts. They do not, however, address the systematic issues that interest us here. Specifically, neither Meurman-Solin 1992 nor Montgomery 1994 address the diachronic issues of the original development of the opposition, nor does either offer an alternative to the traditional view that the conjunct inflection is triggered by an adjacent personal

pronoun. As we will show in the following section, such an analysis leads to a large class of verbs being wrongly classified as exceptions, ones that find ready explanation under our clitic analysis to be presented below.

3. The clitic analysis.

We believe that it is better and more accurate to re-state the conditions under which we find the conjunct inflectional pattern. It is not the case that adjacency between the pronoun and the verb triggers conjunct inflexion; rather, it is cliticization of the subject pronoun onto the verb which triggers the conjunct verb forms. The cliticization may take place either on the left of the verb, as we saw in examples (2) and (3), or on the right of the verb, as in (4) and (5). Elsewhere, absolute verb forms are used.

We have three reasons for preferring to state the conditions in terms of cliticization. The first reason is that clitic pronouns have been demonstrated to exist in Old English: see van Kemenade 1987 and the discussion in Stockwell and Minkova 1991. Recognizing the significant role played by clitic pronouns in Middle Scots and Northern Middle English thus provides an appealing continuity with the syntax of Old English.

A second reason is that the clitic analysis provides a more explanatory account of some of the examples already seen. (20) and (21), for instance, illustrated pronoun subjects followed by appositive or vocative NPs. The intervening material prevents the pronoun from cliticizing onto the verb, resulting in the absolute verb form instead of the conjunct form.

The most compelling reason, however, for preferring the clitic analysis is that it in fact makes different predictions than the traditional formulation in terms of adjacency. There are examples of pronoun subjects which are adjacent to the verb but not clitic; conversely, some clitic pronoun subjects are not immediately adjacent to the associated verbs. Consider the examples in (31):

(31) MIDDLE SCOTS

- a. Sa lang as Placebo and I
Remaines into your company L4.110-111
'So long as Placebo and I remain in your company'
- b. ..., the prince suld consider quhat pairt
haldis thai that ar lelest, wisest, and of maist experiens.
'the prince should consider what position
they who are most loyal, wisest, and of most experience hold'
[extract from John of Ireland in Smith, p. 96.3ff]

Although the orthographic form of a pronoun in our texts does not vary between the clitic use and the stressed, independent form, a difference may be seen in the syntactic behavior of the pronoun. If a pronoun is conjoined with another NP, as in (31a), the pronoun must be a stressed, independent word. Likewise, if the pronoun is modified by a relative clause, as in (31b), it must be in the independent form, not the clitic form. In some instances, as we see in (31), this results in a pronoun being adjacent to a verb, but because the pronoun is not a clitic we find the absolute form of verb agreement, not the conjunct form.

The other side of the coin is that a clitic pronoun may be separated from its verb by other

clitic material, such as object pronouns. We here give a long list of examples, to show the range of person and number features found with both the subject and the object clitics. (Notice that (32a) and (32e) have reflexive readings of the object clitics.)

- (32) MIDDLE SCOTS
- a. I me commend fra yeir till yeir D21.10.3
'I commend myself from year to year'
 - b. I the tell R51
'I tell thee'
 - c. I him se R402
'I see him'
 - d. We The beseik, O Lord of lordis all, H137.9
'we beseech Thee, O Lord of all lords'
 - e. We us repent and tyme mispent H139.86
'we repent ourselves and mispent time'
 - f. That we them hate in meekle thing B327.134
'how much we hate them'
 - g. Sir manassing thay me mak, forsuith, ilk yeir, R202
'they make me frequent [?], forsooth, each year'
- (33) NORTHERN MIDDLE ENGLISH
- a. I yow telle M692
'I tell you'
 - b. Do als I the rede, Ro.52.9
'Do as I advise you'
 - c. I thee commaund T26.118
'I command thee'

In addition, we have an example of the negative clitic *ne* intervening between the (clitic) subject and the verb in Northern Middle English:

- (34) NME I ne rekke whethir I lyfe or dye M398
'I don't care whether I live or die'

It is important to see that it is not the case that preverbal object clitics themselves trigger the conjunct form of the verb. The examples in (35) and (36) show that the object clitic is simply transparent for the purposes of the conjunct/absolute opposition, and that it is the relationship between the subject and the verb which determines the inflexional pattern of the verb:

- (35) MIDDLE SCOTS
- a. All the lang day scho me dispyts L2147
'all day long she disputes with me'
 - b. And se quhat men them leids L2349
'and see what men lead them'
 - c. His fayis him haldis now in thrang B171.251

- 'His foes hold him now in throng'
 d. And thir Blonkis that vs beiris, R555
 'and these steeds that bear us'
 (36) NME Lufe us clenses Ro.43.7
 'love cleanses us'

Specifically, in (35a) and (36) the verb takes the suffix *-s* because the subject is third person singular; in (35b, c) it is the lexical third person plural subject that requires the absolute form of the verb; in (35d) the verb appears in the absolute form because it is used in a subject-centered relative clause.

We will here conclude the synchronic portion of the paper by saying that a comprehensive and accurate description of the conjunct/absolute phenomenon is not only important in its own right, but is also a necessary prerequisite for undertaking any historical analysis of the split conjugation.

4. Diachronic perspectives.

In conclusion, we would like to turn very briefly to the diachronic aspects of the split conjugation which will be the focus of our continued research of the problem. First, we draw attention to our claim stated earlier that the split conjugation is in some sense "un-Germanic", a judgment based on the observation that, to our knowledge, nowhere else in Germanic do we ever find a similar interplay of basic morphological marking with syntagmatic syntactical environment such as in this case, much less any split conjugational system that resembles the one described here. In saying that a given phenomenon is relatively atypical for a language or language family, one is not necessarily forced to conclude that that phenomenon must needs have arisen as a result of language contact, and in the case of the split conjugation we are not yet prepared to reject the possibility that the phenomenon is ultimately a wholly native, albeit peculiar, innovation. Nevertheless, we also see in this phenomenon a strikingly Celtic spirit or *Sprachegeist*. Indeed, it is its resemblance to morphosyntactic phenomena in the insular Celtic languages that first drew our attention to the split conjugation, and, although we still feel the question of Celtic influence remains open, our choice of the terms CONJUNCT and ABSOLUTE, borrowed from Celtic linguistics, reflects our observation of the resemblance of the split conjugation system to almost identical patterns of syntactic conditioning on the morphological shape of the present tense verb forms in older stages of Irish and Scots Gaelic. In our future research, we therefore intend to investigate in detail the structural linguistic and sociohistorical factors that may have resulted in the rise of the split conjugation phenomenon through language contact. At the same time, however, we fully recognize the need to examine the development and use of the grammatical feature in terms of language-internal function and structure and to explore its possible ramifications for our more general understanding of the morphosyntactic development in our language as a whole, from the Old to the Modern period.

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