

How *them* could have been *his*

Rhona Alcorn
 Angus McIntosh Centre for Historical Linguistics
 University of Edinburgh
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 KU Leuven

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Introduction

- Developments in ME include:
 - borrowing of 3 pl forms from ON
 - transition from OE nfs *heo* > ME *she*
- Studies tend to focus on history of PDE forms
- ME *she*
 - just one of many variants for ‘she’
 - no better a contender than its competitors

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Introduction

- *his*: an early competitor for ModE ‘them’
 - data
 - existing accounts (& their problems)
 - alternative theories
 - conclusions

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PI object pronoun forms in eME

- Three ‘regular’ form types:
 - hi*-type (< OE 3 acc pl)
 - him*-type (< OE 3 dat pl)
 - þeim*-type (< ON)

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- *hi*-type increasingly gave way to *him*-type

1. He shof **hem** alle upon an hyl
 ‘He shoved **them** all upon a hill’
 (havelokt.tag)

- and (in the North) to *þeim*-type

2. He sale bringe **þaim** alle to grunde
 ‘He shall bring **them** all to ground’
 (edincmct.tag)

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An eME innovation

3. þet is þe felliste best þet me clepeþ hyane / þet ondelfþ þe
 bodies of dyade men and **hise** eteþ
 ‘That is the most savage beast that one calls ‘hyena’ / which digs
 up the bodies of dead men and eats **them**’ (ayenbitet.tag)
4. And zelfa two sunes him ber \ Lia calde **is** gad and asser
 ‘And Zelfa two sons to him bore \ Leah called **them** Gad and
 Asher’ (genexodt.tag)
5. al swo he ðe **hes** alle iscop
 ‘as he who created **them** all’ (vvat.tag)

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his-type pl object pronouns

- Earliest examples date to c.1200
- Distinguished by 's'
 - *his, hys, hies, hise, hes, es, is, ys, as, -s*
- 153 tokens in *A Linguistic Atlas of Early ME* (LAEME) corpus
- Found only in direct object contexts, i.e. where we might expect a reflex of OE acc. pl. *hi*

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his-type pl object pronouns

- A minor variant type overall
- Favoured over *hi*- and *him*-types in DO contexts in just 3 texts:
 - *ayenbite* (Kent): 62x *his*, 22x *him*
 - *vva* (SW Essex): 24x *his*, 14x *him*, 2x *hi*
 - *vvb* (SW Essex): 5x *his*, 2x *him*

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Fulk (2012: 65) on origin

- 'accusative forms with <s> first appear in the later twelfth century, apparently representing *hi* with addition of the commonest plural marker in nouns'

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	fem sg	pl
nom	heo	hi
acc	hi	hi
gen	hire	hira
dat	hire	him

- Fulk doesn't spell it out, but addition of -s surely to distinguish number

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Fulk (2012: 65) on origin

- pl *his*-type < OE acc pl *hi* + plural -s
 - ✓ Explains why pl *his*-type appears only in DO contexts
 - ✓ Pl -s increasingly the norm in ME nominal system
 - ✓ Parallel development in non-standard ModE pl *yous(e)*
 - ✓ Explains why unattested in North (with its new *þeim*-type)

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Problem ...

- LAEME also has 82 sg *his*-type tokens
 - all in DO contexts (like pl)
 - earliest examples date to c.1200 (like pl)
- Appear only in contexts where we might expect a reflex of OE acc. fem. sg. *hi*

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Grammatically fem. antecedent

6. þe ðe godes **milce** sechð . jwis he mei **his** finde
 'He who seeks god's **mercy**, surely he may find **it**'
milce < OE *milts* fem. (egpm1t.tag)
7. þe þet **echte** wile halden wel hwile þe he muge **es** wealdan
 'He that intends to hold **property** well while he can wield **it**'
echte < OE *æht* fem. (lampm.tag)
8. and nimeþ þe tresor of þe **herte** and **hise** uelþ a-yen mid ydelenesse
 'and (they will) take the treasure from the **heart** and fill **it** again with idleness'
herte < OE *heorte* fem. (ayenbitet.tag)

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... or human female referent

9. On of þe holie writes [...] bringen us blisfulle tiðinges of an edie **meiden** þe was iferen bispused þe heuenliche kinge . & seið þ he **hes** fette hom
 'One of the holy writes [...] bring to us blissful tidings of a blessed **maiden** who was bespoused to the heavenly king as his wife, and says that he fetched **her** home'
 (meiden < OE *mægden* neut.) (trhomBt.tag)

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his-type DO pronouns (sg & pl)

- Persisted into late ME and with same regional distribution
- Not attested after c.1500

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- The sg *his*-type tokens argue against Fulk's analysis
 - especially as they first appear at the same time as pl tokens
 - especially as several texts have both sg and pl tokens

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Existing commentary

	sg use	origin
Fulk (2012: 65)	x	✓ (for pl only)
Mossé (1952: §65)	x	x
Fisiak (1968: 88)	x	x
Wright & Wright (1928: §376)	✓	x
Mustanoja (1960: 135)	✓	x
Morsbach (1897: 331)	✓	✓
Nielsen (1981: 165)	✓	✓

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Morsbach (1897), Nielsen (1981)

- Both point to other WGmc s-ful forms, eg:
 - OFr: n/asf., n/ap **s(e)**
 - MDu: sf. & pl **si** (full), **-se** (clitic)
 - OS: nsf. **siu**, asf. **sia**, n/apf **sia**
 - OHG: nsf. **siu**, asf. **sia**, n/ap. **si**

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Morsbach (1897: 331) on *his*-type

- A native development based on survival of an older 3 person *s*-stem (which corresponds to the 's' of other WGmc *s*-ful forms)
- English forms developed initially as enclitic pronouns, and later expanded to non-clitic forms *es, is, hes, his*, etc.
- **Problem:** given such an ancient provenance, why is the *his*-type not attested until 1200? (Howe 1996: 140)

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Nielsen (1981: 165)

- The *his*-type 'is not seen in OE, but is attested in the SE dialect of ME, perhaps as a result of contacts with the Continent'
 - what sort of contact? Other evidence?
 - why are English forms *s*-final when Continental forms are *s*-initial?
 - attested across the Midlands too

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	fem sg	pl
nom	heo	hi
acc	hi	hi
gen	hire	hira
dat	hire	him

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Acc. pronoun ambiguities

- Nom pl, acc pl & acc fem sg share identical forms already in OE
- The distinction between nom fem sg and acc fem sg is usually maintained in WS; **elsewhere there is some evidence for a merger of forms already in OE** (OED *hoo*, pron.)

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Acc. pronoun ambiguities

- Addition of *-s* to acc pl & fem sg to distinguish direct objects from subjects?
- Unlikely:
 - the ambiguities are long-standing, why wait until 1200 to resolve them?
 - word order changes increasingly resolve any formal ambiguities

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	fem sg	pl
nom	heo	hi
acc	hi → hire	hi → him
gen	hire	hira
dat	hire	him

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DO pronoun ambiguities

- Adoption of *his* to maintain a DO/IO contrast?
 - ✓ explains why *his*-type appears only in DO contexts
 - ✓ explains why earliest forms appear when they do (pace Morsbach 1897 & Fulk 2012)
- But why *his*?
- And why not also maintain contrast for masc & neut sg?

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Why *his*?

- Attested by 24 different eME text witnesses right across the Midlands: can't have been plucked from the air
- Exaptation of masc & neut sg poss. *his*
 - maximally contrastive with pl & fem sg DO, so ambiguity in context unlikely

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Why only pl & fem sg?

- DO/IO distinction increasingly lost in masc & neut sg too:
 - ams *hine* gave way to dms *him* (> ModE *him*)
 - dns *him* gave way to ans *hit* (> ModE *it*)
- DO *his* would clash with possessive
- English personal pronoun paradigm has always been highly complex

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Conclusions

- DO pronoun *his* was an ME innovation
- Minor variant in most texts but lasted to 1500
- Origins:
 - ruled out suggestions by Fulk (2012), Morsbach (1897) and Nielsen (1981)
 - propose paradigm-internal borrowing instead
- Motivation: resistance to loss of DO/IO contrast

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