

Stylistic fronting in the *Ormulum* - Scandinavian syntactic phenomena in Early Middle English texts

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1. Introduction

1.1 Scandinavian influence in Middle English texts

Middle English (ME) is often considered a transitional stage - it is the period of time when English changed from an OV to a VO language. There were, of course, other changes during that time at other levels of grammar like changes in phonology and morphology - reduction of all vowels of nearly all unstressed syllable inflections, case syncretism in noun morphology or the fact that prepositional use expands enormously (which can be seen as functional replacement for case marking) and the like. As concerns the OV/VO word order change it has been assumed that it was triggered by language contact with the Scandinavian language (Kroch 1989, Kroch & Taylor 1997). There is evidence for Scandinavian impact in northern texts of Middle English. Whereas southern texts exhibit West Germanic characteristics like verb raising and cliticisation, northern texts exhibit Scandinavian characteristics like consistent V2 in matrix clauses, loss of cliticisation and stylistic fronting. There is further non-syntactic as well as syntactic evidence for Scandinavian influence from the *Ormulum*¹, an Early Middle English poetic text, written about 1200 in Lincolnshire (a region situated within the Danelaw). The reason why this text is so interesting is that although it has a metrical pattern, it is written in unrhymed verse and seems to be a witness of spoken language rather than an artefact which has nothing to do with naturally produced language. Moreover, there are many Scandinavian characteristics on the word-level which justify the question whether these can also be found on the syntactic level. The examples below illustrate the borrowing of lexical and grammatical items from Scandinavian found in the text:

Lexical items:

¹The *Ormulum* is part of the Penn-Helsinki-Parsed Corpus of Middle English (PPCME2) which is available at <http://www.ling.upenn.edu/mideng>.

- (1) icc amm **ammbohht**² all bun to follghenn Godess wille;
I am maidservant all ready to follow God's will
 'I am a maidservant and all ready to follow God's will.'
 (CMORM,I,79.696)
- (2) Forr baþe leddenn **usell**³ lif i metess & i clapess, ...
for both led wretched life in meat and in clothes
 'For both led a wretched life in splendour.'
 (CMORM,I,28.336)
- (3) ... Forr **baþe** wærenn alde.
for both were old
 '... for both were old.'
 (CMORM,I,6.176)

Grammatical items:

Third person plural forms of pronouns⁴:

- (4) ... þatt mann birrþ spellenn to þe folc off **þe33re** sawle nede.
that it behoves man to preach to the folc of their soul's need
 '... that it behoves man to preach to the folc of their soul's need.'
 (CMORM,DED.L23.11)
- (5) Forrþi þatt he **þe33m** wolde þa to rihhte læfe wendenn.
because that he them would then to right belief turn
 'because that he would then turn them to the right belief.'
 (CMORM,I,118.1025)
- (6) ... 3iff **þe33** mughenn swa þe Demess are winnenn.
if they may so the Judge's grace win
 '... if they may so the Lord's grace win.'
 (CMORM,I,131.1113)

The second person singular form of the verb 'to be'⁵:

- (7) ... & better **arrt** tu þann ure preost, ...
and better are you than our priest
 '... and better are you than our priest ...'
 (CMORM,I,96.838)

²From Old Norse (ON) *ambótt*.

³From ON *úsæll*.

⁴The OE forms were 'hi(e),' 'hem,' 'here.'

⁵The Old English (OE) form was 'we syndon,' the ON form was 'we aron.'

The preposition *till* used in the sense of ‘to’:

- (8) ... To farenn all **till** helle.
to go all to hell
 ‘... to go all to hell.’

(CMORM,INTR.L29.105)

The extensive use of verb + preposition on the model of Old Norse (ON):

- (9) Forr þatt menn sholldenn cnawenn himm ... & **cumenn till** þe
for that men should know him and come to the
 Cristenndom ...
Christendom
 ‘For that man should know him ... and join christendom.’

(CMORM,I,120.1039)

However, there is not only non-syntactic evidence for Scandinavian influence in these texts, there are also syntactic phenomena like stylistic fronting to be found in the *Ormulum*:

- (10) ... all þatt **streonedd** wass þurh himm.
and all that begotten was through him
 ‘... and all that begotten was through him ...’

(CMORM,INTR.L29.105)

In the following, I will show that examples like (10) show unambiguous cases of stylistic fronting in the *Ormulum*. Further, I claim that the fronting operation is used for metrical reasons in the text, and that this finding supports Holmberg’s (2000) analysis of stylistic fronting as a PF-operation. Moreover, it is shown that my analysis also supports Kroch & Taylor’s (1997) conjecture that there is evidence for Scandinavian impact in northern texts of Middle English.

2. Stylistic fronting in the *Ormulum*

2.1 *The conditions for the occurrence of stylistic fronting*

Stylistic fronting, a syntactic phenomenon only found in Scandinavian languages, is fronting of a participle, adjective, adverb or verbal particle in embedded clauses in which the subject has been moved out of its canonical position. Modern Icelandic and Faroese exhibit this construction which is illustrated in the examples below 1) with a participle, 2) with an adjective, 3) with an adverb, 4) with the negation *ekki* (examples are from Modern

Icelandic):

- (11) Sólin var sest þá **sígt** var að landi.
sun-the was set when sailed was to land
 ‘The sun was set when (the ship) was sailed to land.’
- (12) Þetta er maðurinn sem **feitur** þykir.
this is man-the who fat seems-to-be
 ‘This is the man who seems to be fat.’
- (13) Nefndin sem **vel** stóð að málunum var heiðruð.
committee-the which well stood at matters was honoured
 ‘The committee which did a good job was honoured.’
- (14) Nefndin sem **ekki** stóð vel að málunum var heiðruð.
committee-the which not stood well at matters was honoured
 ‘The committee which didn't do a good job was honoured.’

According to Nygaard (1906), Falk (1993), Platzack (1988) and Vikner (1995), the fronting operation occurred very frequently in older stages of Scandinavian (the examples below are from Old Norse (ON), Old Swedish (OS) and Middle Danish (MD)):

- (15) ON. ... at **heriat** var í ríki hans.
that harried was in kingdom his
 ‘... that was harried in his kingdom.’
 (Nygaard 1906: 377)
- (16) OS. En [...] som **likir** war enom hofman.
one that alike was a courtier
 ‘One ... that resembled a courtier.’
 (Falk 1993: 178)
- (17) MD. ... och haf oc alt thet ther **fødh** ær i iørderige.
and sea and all that whic born is in earth-realm
 ‘... and sea and all that is born in the realm of the earth.’
 (Vikner 1995: 162)

Maling (1990) argued that stylistic fronting constructions are instances of subject extraction (e.g. relativisation, question formation), i.e. this construction is possible only when there is a subject gap:

- (18) *Sólin var sest þá **sígt** var *skipið* að landi.
sun-the was set when sailed was ship-the to land
 ‘The sun was set when the ship was sailed to land.’

The examples of stylistic fronting from the *Ormulum* all contain a subject

gap which is shown with the examples below⁶:

- (19) and þatt hird þatt **todæledd** wass onn hirdess rihht sextene ...
and that household that divided was in sixteen proper households
 ‘and that household that was divided into sixteen proper households ...’
 (CMORM,I, 17.255)
- (20) ... to bærnenn all þatt **ifell** iss ...
to burn all that evil is
 ‘... to burn all that is evil ...’
 (CMORM,I,58.538)
- (21) ... off hire sune Jesu Crist, þatt **newenn** cumenn shollde.
off her son Jesus Christ who newly come should
 ‘... of her son Jesus Christ who should come anew.’
 (CMORM,I,75.672)
- (22) & bettre arrt tu þann ure preost, þatt **nohht** ne mihhte trowwenn
and better are you than our priest who not NEG might believe
 þatt word ...
that word
 ‘and you are better than our priest who might not believe the word ...’
 (CMORM,I,96.838)

Table 1 shows the relation between occurrences and non-occurrences of stylistic fronting in the *Ormulum*:

⁶It should be noted here that there are other northern Middle English texts which show stylistic fronting like e.g. *The Northern Prose Rule of St. Benet* (written in Yorkshire in the 14th century). However, this text does not show it as frequently as the *Ormulum* does and as this text is written in prose a connection between stylistic fronting and phonology cannot be shown.

Table 1: stylistic fronting with a subject gap in the *Ormulum*

The Ormulum					
stylistic fronting with a subject gap	yes	%	no	%	Total
of a past participle	42	43	56	57	98
of an adjective	7	23	23	77	30
of an adverb	38	66	20	34	58
of the negation <i>nohht</i>	7	70	3	30	10
of a verb particle	0	0	6	100	6
TOTAL	94	47	108	53	202

Table 1 shows that the fronting operation occurs most frequently with past participles and adverbs. On the whole it occurs 47% of the time, i.e. there are also cases in the same environment (clauses with subject gaps) where stylistic fronting does not occur (52%) which implies that stylistic fronting is optional. In the next section I will give evidence that the cases I claimed to be stylistic fronting are indeed instantiations of the fronting operation.

2.2 Stylistic fronting with a subject gap

We have seen above that it seems that stylistic fronting occurs in the *Ormulum*. The question is now whether there is evidence that the instantiations described as stylistic fronting in 2.1 are indeed stylistic fronting. It was shown above that there is a condition for the occurrence of stylistic fronting, namely that this construction only occurs when there is a subject gap. Therefore, if the frequency of potential stylistic fronting is higher in clauses with subject gaps than in clauses with full subject DPs then there is evidence that these cases are indeed stylistic fronting because the fronting operation requires a subject gap. Table 2 shows that this is really the case:

Table 2: Stylistic-fronting elements in clauses with a full subject DP

The Ormulum					
sf-elements in clauses with a full subject DP	before V _{fin}	%	after V _{fin}	%	Total
of a past participle	7	6	114	94	121
of an adjective	1	3	28	97	29
of an adverb	8	13	52	87	60
of the negation <i>nohht</i>	4	23	13	77	17
of a verb particle	0	0	7	100	7
TOTAL	20	8	214	92	234

Table 2 shows that the frequency of fronted elements is quite low in clauses with a full subject DP. If the results in Table 2 are compared with the results in Table 1, it becomes clear that the fronting of elements occurs much more frequently in clauses with a subject gap (e.g. fronting of a past participle with subject gap 43 %, but only 6 % with a full subject DP), and that there has to be a correlation between the fronting construction and subject gaps⁷. This is evidence, therefore, that the examples found in the *Ormulum* are cases of stylistic fronting.

2.3 Further evidence: Stylistic fronting with a subject pronoun

In this section I will show that the analysis discussed above is further supported by another type of stylistic fronting found in the *Ormulum* namely stylistic fronting with a pronominal subject as described in Platzack (1988) for Old Swedish (i.e. whenever the subject is a pronoun the fronting operation occurs). Examples (23) and (24) show this type of stylistic fronting in Old Swedish, examples (25) and (26) show examples from the *Ormulum*:

⁷The cases with the participle preceding the finite verb very likely show cases of Infl-final word order which was still to be found in Early Middle English (although very rare). The examples with a "fronted" adverb show that these elements could occur in different positions in the clause at that time. The examples with "fronted" *nohht* show that it could occur before *ne* because of its status as a sentence adverb (see Trips 2002 for a thorough discussion).

- (23) OS. ... sua lenge *the saman* æru um disk ok duk.
so long (as) they together are at plate and cloth
 ‘... so long as they together are at plate and cloth.’
 (Platzack 1988: 227)
- (24) OS. ... æn *han ey* sigher thigiandamæssu.
if he not says Silent Mass
 ‘... if he doesn't say Silent Mass.’
 (Platzack 1988: 227)
- (25) & ziff þatt *tu forrlangedd* arrt to cumenn upp till Criste.
and if that you longed-for are to come up to Christ
 ‘and if you longed for coming up to Christ.’
 (CMORM,I,42.436)
- (26) ... & wiste þatt zho *clene* wass off alle menn onn eorþe ...
and know that she clean was of all men on earth
 ‘and you should know that she was clean of all men on earth.’
 (CMORM,I,100.863)

Table 3 shows the occurrence of stylistic fronting in clauses with a pronominal subject:

Table 3: Stylistic fronting with a pronominal subject in the *Ormulum*

The Ormulum					
with a pronominal subject	yes	%	no	%	Total
of a past participle	17	15	98	85	115
of an adjective	7	11	57	15	64
of an adverb	44	28	114	29	158
of the negation <i>nohht</i>	25	60	17	4	42
of a verb particle	0	0	11	3	11
TOTAL	92	24	267	76	359

Table 3 shows that the fronting operation occurs 24 % of the time with a pronominal subject whereas it does not occur 76 % of the time in the same environment. If these results are now compared with the results from Table

2, it can be shown that stylistic fronting occurs more frequently in clauses containing a subject gap than in clauses with a pronominal subject. Still this finding supports the hypothesis that in the *Ormulum* stylistic fronting occurs, and even more so as we find two types of this construction. In the following section it will be shown that in the Early Middle English text investigated here the fronting operation is a phonological phenomenon due to metrical reasons.

3. Stylistic fronting as a phonological phenomenon (due to metrical reasons)

3.1 Metre of the *Ormulum*

So far we have seen that the *Ormulum* is a northern Early Middle English texts showing non-syntactic as well as syntactic evidence for Scandinavian influence. In the following I will show that stylistic fronting plays a special role in this text - it is used by its author whenever the metrical pattern would be otherwise violated. This implies that it must have been part of Orm's grammar and that he used the fronting operation for phonological reasons.

There are a number of reasons for investigating metre in a text like the *Ormulum*: 1) the text can be dated and located quite precisely, 2) it adheres very systematically and rigidly to one metrical form, 3) its almost uniformly Germanic vocabulary precludes the possibility that there is prosodic influence from Anglo-Norman or French. Studies on the metre in this text (Kaluza 1911, Mossé 1952) have always claimed that Orm's verse is extremely regular, i.e. every line has fifteen syllables exactly counted out and ends in the pattern "stressed - unstressed syllable". There is a caesura after the eighth syllable, and the rhythm is iambic⁸ :

(27) Her hábbe icc sh'æwedd þrínne **lác**⁹
 here have I shown three-fold sacrifice
 Forr þrínne kínne léode,
 for three kinds (of) people

(CMORM,I,37.403)

As shown in (27), the *Ormulum* is written in long lines which are divided into two half lines. The lines invariably contain seven strong beats

⁸In this section, I will leave out the idiomatic translation of the examples because it is not relevant for what is claimed here.

⁹Stressed syllables will be marked by accents throughout this section. Where this is technically not possible (e.g. with special characters) the stressed syllable will be marked with an apostrophe preceding it.

distributed 4 : 3 across the line. Moreover, each strong metrical position is flanked by weaks. There are also positions which can only be filled by certain elements and are thus rather fixed, e.g. in the fourth foot of the first half-line there is reliable and unambiguous matching between metric and prosodic prominence: in about 90% of the time the fourth-foot ictus is filled by a monosyllable (Minkova 1996). Minkova has further claimed that in the text, inflectional endings of verbs and nouns must not occur in the ictus of a foot, i.e. they must not be stressed because prosodic rules of language do not allow this. The rigid pattern of the text requires thus that some positions have to be filled by the same type of syllables, otherwise the iambic metre will be violated. The question is now in which way stylistic fronting has an effect on the metrical pattern of the text.

3.2. *The relation between stylistic fronting and metre in the Ormulum*

As noted above, I claim that the author of the text uses stylistic fronting whenever the order without the fronting operation would lead to a violation of the rigid iambic metre in which the text is written. Wrt the occurrence of stylistic fronting in the *Ormulum* there seem to be two requirements then: 1) whenever there is a relative clause with a monosyllabic auxiliary followed by a two-syllable participle, stylistic fronting is forced because inflectional endings of participles must not occur in the ictus of a foot; 2) the fourth foot ictus of the first half-line always has to be filled by a monosyllable (see also Minkova 1996). That these requirements hold will be shown in the following examples:

- (28) ... þatt óferrwérrc þatt **tímmbredd wáss**
 that over-work that build was
 abúfenn Góðess árrke ...
 above God's ark

(CMORM,I,59.543)

As concerns requirement 1) it can be observed that in the text, the relative complementiser *þatt* ‘that’ introduces the relative clause. It is normally not stressed because it is a function word. This implies in a strict iambic metre that the following syllable would have to bear stress. If the following element is a one-syllable word, the word after that would have to begin with an unstressed syllable. In a relative clause without stylistic fronting the auxiliary *wass* ‘was’ bears stress and is followed by the participle *tímmbredd* ‘built,’ the first syllable of which would then have to be unstressed. However, this would also imply that the inflectional ending of *tímmbredd* would bear stress, but this is ruled out by prosodic rules of

language¹⁰.

- (28') *... þatt óferrwérrc þatt **wáss timmbrédd**
abúfenn Góðess árrke ...

(CMORM,I,59.543)

As concerns requirement 2) it can be shown that the matching between metric and prosodic prominence in the fourth foot of the first half-line holds for cases where stylistic fronting has applied. The first syllable of past participles which have undergone the fronting operation appears most of the time in the ictus of the third foot. Thus, the monosyllabic auxiliary appears in the ictus of the fourth foot:

- (29) ... þatt óferrwérrc þatt **tímmbredd wáss**
abúfenn Góðess árrke ...

(CMORM,I,59.543)

There are other cases which show that the two requirements have to be fulfilled, e.g. fronted past participles with three syllables:

- (30) Wíþþ áll þatt tátt **bitácnedd wáss**
with all that that signified was
Þurh álle þéggre lákess.
through all their sacrifices

(CMORM,I,32.356)

Here, the second syllable of the participle *bitacnedd* 'signify' bears stress, i.e. it is in the ictus of the third foot. The following syllable, the inflectional ending, is unstressed and the monosyllabic auxiliary *wass* is in the ictus of the fourth foot of the first half line. If the iambic metre is strictly followed here, then the relative complementiser *þatt* 'that' has to bear stress. If stylistic fronting had not taken place then requirement 2) would not hold which is shown in (30'):

- (30') * Wíþþ áll þatt tátt **wass bitacnédd**
Þurh álle þéggre lákess.

(CMORM,I,32.356)

The same can be shown for a clause with a modal, an auxiliary and a participle:

¹⁰i.e. inflectional endings with reduced vowels like 'schwa'.

- (31) ... Þatt **filledd shúlen**n b́en þurh Gódd
that filled should be through God
 Att héore ríhhte tíme.
at their right time

(CMORM,I,4.160)

The comparison of this clause and the version without stylistic fronting

- (31') * Þatt **shúlen**n b́en **filléd** þurh Gódd
 Att héore ríhhte tíme.

(CMORM,I,4.160)

shows that the first syllable of the modal *shulenn* 'shall' is in the ictus of the first foot and the monosyllabic auxiliary *ben* 'be' in the ictus of the second foot. According to strict iambic metre the second syllable of the two-syllable participle *filled* 'filled,' which would be its inflectional ending, is in the ictus of the third foot but this is ruled out by prosodic rules of language.

As shown above, stylistic fronting also occurs with elements like adjectives. The following example shows that the requirements given above also hold for these cases:

- (32) To bærnenn áll þatt **ífell** íss
to burn all that evil is
 Awégg inn híse þéowwess.
away in his servants

(CMORM,I,58.538)

The adjective *ifell* "evil" bears stress on the first syllable according to the accent rules of Germanic (initial word accent). As the adjective is disyllabic and the auxiliary *iss* 'is' monosyllabic, stylistic fronting is forced here because otherwise the adjective would have to be in the ictus of the fourth foot which would violate the Germanic stress rule ('evil' is not a word of Romance origin):

- (32') * To bærnenn áll þatt **íss iféll**
 Awégg inn híse þéowwess.

(CMORM,I,58.538)

Moreover, there are examples like the one given in (33) where the use of stylistic fronting in order to stick to the metrical pattern becomes even clearer:

- (33) ... & áll þatt **stréonedd wáss** þurh hím
and all that begotten was through him
Wass stréonedd tó þatt íllke...
was begotten to that same

(CMORM,INTR.L29.105)

Here, stylistic fronting can occur in the first half-line because it is a relative clause where the subject has been extracted, and stylistic fronting is forced for the reasons discussed above. In the second half-line we find exactly the same construction but here the order monosyllabic auxiliary followed by a two-syllabic participle matches the metre, i.e. stylistic fronting is not forced in this case.

From what was shown with the examples above I claim that the fronting operation was part of Orm's grammar due to intense Scandinavian influence on his language. Orm "uses" stylistic fronting in cases which otherwise would have evoked a clash between metrical and prosodic rules. Of course, he could have made other changes in the line to be able to stick to metre but as stylistic fronting was part of his grammar he could use this construction for stylistic reasons instead of making some artificial changes.

The fact that stylistic fronting adheres to these requirements shows that the fronting operation is metrically driven. This further implies that it supports Holmberg's (2000) analysis of stylistic fronting as a PF-operation. This analysis states that the trigger for the fronting operation is an extended version of the Extended Projection Principle (EPP) which says that the condition can be satisfied by other categories than the subject. Holmberg claims that a nominal feature (or a set of features) [D] as well as a phonological feature [P] have to be checked in the course of the derivation because they are uninterpretable features. In languages like Modern Icelandic the [D]-feature can be checked by the finite verb due to rich verbal morphology. However, the [P]-feature cannot be checked that way. Therefore, Holmberg assumes that there are three possibilities to check this feature: 1) a nominal subject, if available, moves up to Spec, IP; 2) if a nominal subject is not available, a thematic subject is merged in Spec, IP; 3) if neither a nominal subject nor a thematic subject is available a visible category closest to Spec, IP is moved in this position to check the [P]-feature. The third option is the one where stylistic fronting takes place. The assumption that only the phonological features are affected can account for the fact that elements of all kinds of categories can move (participles, adverbs, PPs, etc.) because stylistic fronting does not see any other features of syntactic categories, it only checks for the presence or absence of the

phonological features. He can further account for the fact why the fronting operation occurs only in clauses with a subject gap as traces are not visible and can therefore not block it. The findings from the *Ormulum* and the obvious relation between stylistic fronting and metre in the text supports Holmbergs analysis then, because whenever stylistic fronting occurs here the phonological features have to be checked due to the metrical pattern of the text, i.e. the fronting operation is metrically driven and not part of Narrow Syntax.

4. Results

In this paper I have shown that in northern texts of Middle English there is evidence for non-syntactic as well as syntactic evidence for Scandinavian influence on the English language. The findings from the *Ormulum* strengthen this fact in that it shows true cases of stylistic fronting, a fronting operation only found in Scandinavian languages. These findings further support Kroch & Taylor's (1997) conjecture that there is evidence for Scandinavian impact in northern texts of Middle English (written in places of dense Scandinavian settlement during the time of invasions). They show that whereas southern texts exhibit West Germanic characteristics like verb raising and cliticisation, northern texts exhibit Scandinavian characteristics like consistent V2 in matrix clauses, loss of cliticisation and stylistic fronting.

It was further shown that when stylistic fronting occurs in the *Ormulum*, it is used for metrical reasons, i.e. for Orm, the author, it was a possibility to conform to the metrical pattern of his strictly iambic text because the fronting operation was part of his grammar. It was further shown that there are two requirements that have to be fulfilled: 1) whenever there is a relative clause with a monosyllabic auxiliary followed by a two-syllable participle, stylistic fronting is forced because inflectional endings of participles must not occur in the ictus of a foot; 2) the fourth foot ictus of the first half-line always has to be filled by a monosyllable. It was also shown above that the fact that stylistic fronting adheres to these requirements here shows that the fronting operation is metrically driven which supports Holmberg's (2000) analysis of stylistic fronting as a PF-operation.

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