

Old English versus Old Norse vocabulary in the *Ormulum*: the choice of third person plural personal pronouns.¹

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1 Introduction

In the *Ormulum*, two sets of personal pronouns are used in the third person plural, one of Old English origin (the OE set) and one of Old Norse origin (the ON set). The *Ormulum*, written in the second half of the 12th century², is the earliest Middle English (ME) text to make use of the ON set. This paper will explore the distribution of the forms in the two sets and suggest a reason for the dominance of the ON set in the *Ormulum*.³

2 Forms

The forms in the two sets, as well as the OE/ON forms they are derived from, are presented in Tables 1 and 2 below.

¹ First published in *Studies in Anglistics*, ed. by G. Melchers and B. Warren, Stockholm 1995. At that time I was still working at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) at Trondheim. This version was revised in September 1997, and again in January and July 2005, in the light of the results of my investigation of MS. Junius 1 in the spring of 1997. The major changes consist in recognising the reference of the NP as an influence on the choice between *he(o)re* and *þeȝȝre*, and in all the examples being edited directly from MS Junius 1.

² The last entries in the MS. (the Latin pericopes entered by the scribe usually referred to as Hand C) should presumably be dated c. 1180 (Parkes 1983); those entries were, however, preceded by a long period of composition, drafting, copying (numerous omissions, corrected either immediately or very early (presumably in connection with proofreading of a finished page), indicate that the extant MS. was copied from earlier drafts of the text), revision and cyclical corrections/normalization of spelling. Orm may well have started working on his homilies during the later part of, or shortly after, the Anarchy (1137–1154).

³ The only complete text edition of the *Ormulum*, White and Holt 1878, is in many respects unreliable, and any serious investigation of the text must be based on the manuscript. I am grateful to Dr. B.C. Barker-Benfield for granting me access to the manuscript in the spring of 1997.

	OE	Orm
Nominative	hie, heo	—
Dative	heom	hemm
Genitive	heora	heore, here

Table 1. The OE pronoun set.

	ON	Orm
Nominative	þeir	þeȝȝ
Dative	þeim	þeȝȝm
Genitive	þeira	þeȝȝre

Table 2. The ON pronoun set.

The case labels in Tables 1 and 2 refer to the OE/ON stage; in the *Ormulum*, the original dative forms are used as all-purpose (non-genitive) oblique forms. It may be debatable whether *he(o)re*⁴/*þeȝȝre* should be regarded as genitive forms or whether they should be reclassified as possessive pronouns. However, partitive constructions of the type *eȝȝþerr he(o)re* (119, 413)⁵, *eȝȝþerr þeȝȝre* (12874) ‘both of them’ and *nowwþerr þeȝȝre* (12872) ‘neither of them’ justify regarding *he(o)re* and *þeȝȝre* as genitive forms.

3 Distribution

3.1 The nominative

In the nominative, the situation is very simple: only the ON form *þeȝȝ* is used. By contrast, the scribes of the First (1122–1131) and Second (1132–1154) Peterborough Continuations of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, working about 15 miles south of Orm’s monastery at Bourne⁶ (although a generation or two earlier), only use the form *hi* (< OE *hie*).

⁴The form *he(o)re* will be used to denote either of the variant forms *heore* and *here*.

⁵All numbers after examples refer to lines in Holt 1878.

⁶This localization is proposed by Parkes (1983:126–127).

3.2 *The dative/accusative*

The text of the *Ormulum* is written in exceedingly regular iambic verses of fifteen syllables with a caesura after the eighth syllable, dividing the verse into two half-verses. It is this regularity that makes it possible to deduce the rules for the elision of word-final vowels, and thus arrive at a description of the distribution of the dative/accusative forms *hemm/peȝȝm*.

One of the principles guiding Orm's versification seems to have been what we may call the **Hiatus Avoidance Principle** (HAP), 'Avoid vowel hiatus at word boundaries within the verse section'. Two types of devices were available to Orm to make his verses conform to the HAP: on the one hand, a few words exist in parallel forms with and without a final consonant, e.g. *icc/i* 'I', *inn/i* 'in', *min/mi* 'my', *onn/o* 'on', *till/to* 'to' prep., *þin/þi* 'thy'. Of these, the variant with a final consonant is always used if the following word begins with a vowel, or a vowel preceded by *h* (such words may be referred to as V-words). On the other hand, vowel hiatus can be avoided by means of deletion of a word-final or a word-initial vowel. For the purposes of this article it will be sufficient to consider the rule for word-final vowel elision.

Final *a* (as in *fra* 'from'), *i* (as in *bi* 'by'), *o* (as in *ȝho* 'she') and *u* (as in *þu* 'thou') can never be elided.⁷ Final *e* cannot be elided in pronouns like *he*, *we*, *ȝe*, *me*, *þe*; in all other words it can (and will) be elided if the context requires elision, namely, if the following word is a V-word. Like the HAP, this elision rule does not operate across a caesura or between verses. A few examples can be found where the HAP is violated, but these all involve non-elidable word-final vowels.⁸ The rule for final vowel elision is never violated.

It is now possible to describe the distribution of *hemm/peȝȝm* with reference to the rule for final vowel elision. Since *hemm* is a V-word, *peȝȝm* is obligatory after words with a non-elidable final vowel, as in

⁷The only exception to this rule involves the elision of the vowel in the infinitive marker *to* before a verb beginning with a vowel, as in *toffrenn* 'to offer', *tunnbindenn* 'to unbind', *tunn derrstann denn* 'to understand', as well as in the adverb *tekenn* 'in addition' (< OE *to-eacan*).

⁸E.g. *Whi icc till ennglissh hafe wennd* (D113), *7 nu icc wile shæwenn ȝuw* (962), *ȝiff þe iss lef to winnenn itt* (4664), *Þreo hundredd winnterr wass he ald* (8599), *Afftierr þatt ȝe itt nemmnenn* (11061), *Noe 7 [=annd] hise suness þre* (14534).

Þatt he þeȝȝm ȝife blisse (1751). After words ending in an elidable vowel either *hemm* or *þeȝȝm* can be used, in order either to force or to prevent elision. This means that the choice between *hemm* and *þeȝȝm* will affect the number of syllables in the line: *haffde hemm bohht* is thus a metrical equivalent of *haffde þeȝȝm*; cf. *Þatt hallȝe lamb, þatt haffde hemm bohht* (12630) and *Forr ȝiff þe laferrd haffde þeȝȝm* (12972). After a word-final consonant, finally, only *hemm* is used.⁹

3.3 The genitive

The most complex distribution pattern can be recognized in the case of the genitive forms *he(o)re/þeȝȝre*. If the preceding word ends with a vowel or /j/ (written ⟨ȝ⟩), only *þeȝȝre* is used (67 exx.). In the remaining 292 exx., the choice of pronoun form is influenced by the nature of the final segment of the preceding word as well as by the reference of the noun phrase. In addition, Orm's choice of pronoun forms apparently changed over time: in early sections of the text (see Appendix) *he(o)re* dominates; in later sections *þeȝȝre* becomes increasingly more common.

In order to determine the relative importance of the influencing factors mentioned above, a VARBRUL (variable rule) analysis (cf. Rand and Sankoff 1990, Johannesson 1990) of the 287 exx. with variable pronoun usage¹⁰ was carried out, using the Macintosh application GoldVarb 2.1.¹¹ Table 3 shows the results of the VARBRUL analysis.

The high Input value in Table 3 (0.883) shows that Orm tends to favour *þeȝȝre*, regardless of phonological or referential context. The values in the column headed 'Text section' show clearly that Orm's tendency to use *þeȝȝre* in the later sections of the text is totally independent of the influence of phonological or referential context.¹² Considering the length of the text (the surviving MS represents only about one eighth of

⁹There is one apparent exception to this rule, namely *Þatt icc þeȝȝm muȝe lesenn* (10399). A tentative explanation for this example would be that *icc* is a slip for *i*, which was there in Orm's draft, but was inadvertently replaced by *icc* when the fair copy (MS Junius 1) was produced. Alternatively, it is possible to regard this as the first indication that *þeȝȝm* was beginning to encroach on territory previously reserved for *hemm*.

¹⁰Five examples with a divine referent (i.e. Christ) were excluded from the variable rule analysis, viz. *þeȝȝre crist* (15348), *þeȝȝre laferrd* (13107, 19243), *teȝȝre laferrd* (15608), *teȝȝre maȝȝstre* (12979).

¹¹I am grateful to Vibecke Haslerud for supplying me with a copy of GoldVarb 2.1.

¹²In other words, it is not simply the case that phonological or referential contexts favouring *þeȝȝre* dominate in the later text sections, and contexts favouring *he(o)re* dominate in the earlier sections.

the projected work, as indicated in the table of contents), it is fair to assume that the writing of the homilies must have taken Orm many years (cf. Turville-Petre 1947:3). It should not be surprising if some of Orm’s language habits, among them the choice of pronouns, changed over the years.

Result of analysis of *heore/þeȝȝre* variation. 1=*þeȝȝre*, 0=*heore*.

Input: 0.897 N=287

Text section	Preceding sound	Type of referent of NP	Syntactic function
I 0.079	VOC 1.000	DIVINE 1.000	SUBJ 0.830
II 0.197	LAT 0.923	HUM 0.692	GEN 0.561
III 0.270	OTHER 0.472	CONCR 0.661	OBJ 0.396
IV 0.717	-VS 0.207	ABSTR 0.407	PREP_ 0.382
V 0.709			COMPL 0.244

Table 3. Factors promoting or inhibiting the use of *þeȝȝre* rather than *he(o)re* in the *Ormulum*. Values close to 1: *þeȝȝre* favoured. Values close to 0: *he(o)re* favoured. VOC = vowels + /j/; LAT = laterals, i.e. /l/; -VS = voiceless stops, i.e. /ptk/; OTHER = other segments. DIVINE = divine referent, HUM = human referent, CONCR = concrete, non-human referent, ABSTR = abstract referent.

The scale formed by the phonological context types can be related to a sonority scale¹³ (cf. Giegerich 1992:132–133), and we can tentatively refer the impact of phonological context to a **Sonority Principle**: ‘Aim at maximum sonority contrast across word boundaries’. The Sonority Principle subsumes the Hiatus Avoidance Principle.

The ‘type of referent’ factor group shows a neat progression from ABSTRACT over CONCRETE (non-human) and HUMAN to DIVINE, with the latter category always selecting the pronoun *þeȝȝre*. It is quite

¹³The context type scale deviates at two points from what we would expect if it was based on a sonority scale: the semi-vowels /j/ and /w/ ought to have the same influence on the choice of pronoun form, and /r/ ought to have an influence similar to that of /l/, both being liquids. Instead, /w/ and /r/ belong fairly and squarely in the category OTHERS. It is tempting to speculate on possible explanations for this. At the time the *Ormulum* was written, the change /w/ > /v/ had taken place in Old Norse (or was approaching completion; cf. Noreen 1892:110). In keeping with the general Norse impact on Orm’s dialect, is it possible that his /w/ had a more fricative realization, e.g. as a bilabial fricative [β] (it is clearly distinguished from the voiced realization of intervocalic /f/, i.e. [v], in words of OE origin). Similarly, the difference between /r/ and /l/ may have been due to /r/ having a fricative realization or, alternatively, /l/ having a more vocalic realization (especially in final position). Still, it must be kept in mind that this can only be speculation.

possible that DIVINE is not a true knock-out factor, since the number of examples is so small (cf. footnote 10). There is, however, independent evidence which shows that expressions with DIVINE referents in some other respects also differ formally from expressions with non-divine referents, thus making the result more convincing.¹⁴

4 *The sociolinguistic status of the ON set*

Not only is the *Ormulum* the earliest ME text to use the ON third person plural set, but it also stands alone among East Midland texts for a couple of centuries in its extensive use of the ON pronoun forms. To mention but a few other East Midland texts, *Havelok* and *The Bestiary* (B.M. MS Arundel 292) (both *a.* 1300) use only the OE pronoun set (*Havelok hi/hem/here*, *The Bestiary he/hem/here*). In *Floris and Blauncheflour* we find the nominative ON form combined with the oblique forms from the OE set (*þai/hem/hire*). Chaucer uses the same combination of forms in the *Canterbury Tales* (*they/hem/hir*). It is not until the emergence of private letters in English from the early 15th century that we find all the forms in the ON set used consistently in an East Midland dialect (as in the *Paston Letters*), although the oblique form *hem* still lingers on there.

Why, we may ask, does the *Ormulum* stand out from other texts from the same dialect area for such a long time? When the introduction and spread of the ON pronoun set is discussed it is customary to refer to the need for plural forms which could not be confused with singular third person forms, masculine or feminine (see, e.g., Strang 1970:266, Geipel 1971:63, Barber 1993:133). But this does not explain why the *Ormulum* should be centuries ahead of other East Midland texts in this respect. Lass (1992:120) accounts for this difference in terms of the geographical spread of the ON pronoun set from north to south. But this explanation would seem to presuppose a location much further north than is consistent with Orm's use of forms such as *-eþþ* (rather than *-ess*) as the third person singular present tense verb suffix.

¹⁴ Kivimaa (1967:66, 102, 127, 141) reports on DIVINE being a category which influences the choice of relative pronoun in a number of ME texts, including the *Ormulum*. My own analysis (so far unpublished) of the variation between the forms *a/an*, *na/nan*, *mi/min*, *þi/þin* in Orm's original text (before he normalised the forms by adding a final *-n* to the forms that lacked it) shows that DIVINE was a category that strongly affected the choice of form of these words (favouring a form with a final *-n*, with ABSTRACT at the other extreme favouring the *n*-less form).

Part of the answer may be found in the impact of the Hiatus Avoidance Principle and the elision rules mentioned above: the use of *þeȝȝm* can be wholly, and that of *þeȝȝre* partly, explained by the need for a pronoun form that did not begin in *h* + vowel.

But a reference to the elision rules does not help us explain those cases where *he(o)re* and *þeȝȝre* were both possible, but where Orm's preference for *þeȝȝre* increases steadily throughout the text. A possible explanation that will cover these cases as well is suggested by Orm himself in the *Introduction* to his homily collection. In his attempt to prove that it was right that all mankind should be assigned to Hell for Adam's one act of disobedience, Orm says:

7 tatt wass rihht tatt mannkinn wass:
Unnderr þe deofless walde.
All swa summ adam wurrþenn wass:
Þatt haffde hemm alle streonedd.
7 all se iss her bitwenenn þe:
7 tin eorþlike laferrd.
Forr all swa summ þu þeowwtesst himm:
Swa shall þi sune himm þeowwtenn.
Butt iff he wurrþe lesedd út:
Off hiss þeowwdomess bandess.

(‘And it was right that all mankind was subjected to the Devil, just as Adam had been, who had begotten them all, and as the case is here between you and your earthly lord; for just as you serve him, so shall your son serve him, unless he is released from the bonds of servitude.’)

(*Ormulum*, Introduction ll. 37–46)

In other words, Orm's intended audience consisted of serfs and bondmen in the heart of the Danelaw. It is not unreasonable to assume that such an audience would speak an English dialect strongly marked by the presence of forms of Norse origin. Although it is customary to deride Orm's verbosity and his tendency to repeat his explanations at some length, it cannot be denied that he possessed certain rhetorical skills. It would be surprising if he had not made an effort to ensure that

the language he used was appropriate for his explicitly mentioned intended audience.¹⁵

The explanation for Orm's unique pronoun usage that thus suggests itself is thus of a sociolinguistic kind: we will have to assume that Henry II's England was not just characterized by a bilingual situation involving (Norman) French and English and by the presence of regional dialects of English, but also, in the wake of the Norse settlements in earlier centuries, by the presence of clearly marked sociolects of English. The *Ormulum* would thus be written in a more basilectal form than was customary to use in literary texts. By the time of the Paston Letters, the previously basilectal pronoun forms had percolated up to the gentry who could then use them without hesitation in their correspondence.

¹⁵White implicitly takes up the role of the intended audience in influencing the language form used in a text when he deplors the 'corrupt' structure and style of the *Ormulum*:

"Ormin's addresses were directed to the low-born as well as to the higher classes of the laity, to the 'theow' as well as his lord. Such would more readily abandon the strict rules of grammar than their superiors, and thereby anticipate to a certain extent a later phaseology and structure. Any teaching, consequently, to be effectual with an unlearned hearer, would require to be clothed in such garb as he could recognise, and in a style within his comprehension.

"If these points could not be attained by observing the forms and structure still surviving in the language of his day, Ormin, less careful of grammatical accuracy than of the duties as a homilist, would be ready to sacrifice the more regular for a simpler, though more corrupt, structure and style." (White and Holt 1878:lxii).

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Appendix: Text passages from the *Ormulum* included in the investigation.

In the list below, column numbers refer to the numbers of the manuscript columns (two per page) written by Junius in the MS in the 17th century (Turville-Petre 1947:1). Line numbers refer to the Holt edition from 1878.

The MS is written in one hand throughout (Hand A, i.e. Orm himself). The text has received numerous corrections and marginal additions, both in Hand A and Hand B (presumably not Orm's brother Walter, as suggested by Turville-Petre (1947:27), more likely Orm later in life (Parkes 1983:116)). Additional text passages have also been written on inserted leaves of varying size at 17 places in the surviving MS.

Passage numbers (second column below) refer to the sequences of running text in Hand A between two consecutive *lacunae* in the text. The *lacunae* are due to loss of folios from the MS; most of these were lost before Junius numbered the columns in the 17th century, as can be seen below (the exceptions being the *lacunae* between 7 and 8 and between 14 and 15). The *Dedication*, which Orm states was written after the completion of the homilies, is treated as a separate text passage (D); the *Introduction* has not been included for the reason that it contains no examples of *he(o)re/þeȝȝre*.

Only text written by Hand A has been included (cf. White and Holt 1878 Preface, Holm 1922, Turville-Petre 1947), hence the gaps in the line number sequences below. In text passage 6 two sequences of erased (but still legible) lines in Hand A, here numbered 1Ea–66Ea and 1Eb–24Eb, have been included. On the other hand, the text on the inserted leaves in the MS has not been included due to the difficulties of dating these text passages in relation to the text on the folios.

For the purposes of this study, the text passages have been grouped into text sections (numbered I–V) on the basis of similarities in the relative frequencies of occurrence of *he(o)re / þeȝȝre* within each section.

I	1	Coll. 1–12; ll. 1–288, 365–460, 623–898
	2	Coll. 29–44; ll. 899–1032, 1047–1797
II	3	Coll. 53–68; ll. 1798–2334, 2513–2684, 2731–2874
	4	Coll. 77–96; ll. 2875–4009
	5	Coll. 105–136; ll. 4010–4165, 4194–4553, 4572–4773, 4784–5775
	6	Coll. 145–156; ll. 1Ea–66Ea, 1Eb–24Eb, 5862–5911, 5972–6393
III	7	Coll. 161–176; ll. 6394–6977, 7465–7774
	8	Coll. 177–180; ll. 7784–7999
	9	Coll. 205–220; ll. 8000–8240, 8265–8268, 8327–9029
	10	Coll. 225–236; ll. 9030–9034, 9063–9666

- IV** 11 Coll. 245–256; ll. 9667–10290
12 Coll. 261–276; ll. 10301–11059, 11072–11316
13 Coll. 281–296; ll. 11317–12217
14 Coll. 301–308; ll. 12218–12719
- V** 15 Coll. 309–398; ll. 12720–18491
16 Coll. 407–426; ll. 18492–20068
D ll. 1–342