

## ON HIT-IT VARIATION IN OLD ENGLISH

In Old English within the anaphoric pronoun paradigm the 3 p. sg. neuter nom. and acc. is represented by the pronoun 'hit' which in some texts varies with the h-less form 'it'. The study of the conditions and reasons of this variation has been carried out on the basis of 125 'it' cases which are predominantly used in the charters and Ms E of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Only once 'it' is found in the following texts - Aelfric's Lives of Saints (Saint Maur), Aethelstan's law (Almsgiving), one of the records [Rec 26.4], two liturgies [Lit 2 and 4.5], Prayers at Tierce, Invention of the Cross, and in the Rushworth Gospels (Mk 14:44). Other personal pronouns with initial 'h' do not show forms with 'h' dropped except for one dubious case of the inscription on the gold ring - Garmvnd mec ah im - where 'im' could probably stand for 'him'. Our study has been limited to the examples from the Anglo-Saxon charters and chronicles. Of all the charters with 'it' examples we have chosen those which are beyond any doubt as regards their origin and authenticity.

As far as geography of the texts with 'it' is concerned it should be said that they are restricted mainly to the eastern and south-eastern parts of England and seem to be exclusively rare in the north. In this region 'hit' comes across even today. It is interesting to note in passing that in Northumbrian in the intervocalic position vocalization of the spirant did not take place in a number of words e.g. - tēar - норт. tæhher < \*teahur (\*tahur) - tear; ēar - норт. æhher - ear, in contrast to West-Saxon. Thus it prompts us to suggest that the tendency towards pronominal h-dropping started in the later period of OE and found its clear-cut manifestation in the geographical allocation of the variants in the Middle English period.

Etymologically the anaphoric pronoun under analysis goes back to the etymon without initial 'h' which could then be later taken over from the deictic words and spread all over the paradigm supplanting even initial 's' in the feminine 'seo'.

H-dropping generally was explained differently, either sociologically or phonologically. Thus it is beyond any doubt that a number of h-less words neatly suit into the framework of Latin influence theory (hiatus filler) or can be justified as a result of dittography. Neither of these explanations cannot explain h-dropping in our case.

Aelfric in his Grammar while analyzing pronouns gives Latin parallels. For the Latin 3 p. pronouns the author provides demonstrative correlates which is of no great wonder since anaphoric and demonstrative pronouns are in genetic relationship and basically seem difficult to be functionally differentiated. Besides there is another fact which confirms absence of Latin influence on hit/it variation. Such translated works as Boethius' «De consolatione philosophiae», Paul Orosius' «Historiarum adversus paganos», Gregory's «Cura Pastoralis» and «Dialogi», etc. employ only 'hit' which is another prove that Latin actually could not play any part in the process of h-dropping in the pronoun.

Generally the case of dittography can not be excluded. Thus we have the example 'gange it into' (Ch 1483, Whitelock 2) which can be regarded as a result of dittography. But at the same time a great number of cases cannot be understood through dittography. In e.g. 'buten he it here' (Ch 1525, Whitelock 37-8), 'so ic it her hire' (Ch 1531, Whitelock 31) etc the pronoun is preceded and followed by the words with initial 'h'.

The analysis of hit/it variation in connection with the type of sound of the preceding word does not reveal any dependence. Thus out of 157 cases of 'it' usage after C the pronoun is found in 87 examples while after V it is used in 42 cases. Moreover among 87 examples on 'it' 43 cases appear to be used with one and the same phrase i.e. 'þat it cymð' presented by different spelling variants. Besides, the examples with 'hit' after 'þat' outnumber the same examples with 'it'. Thus it can be stated that the frequency of 'it' usage does not depend on the type of sound of the preceding word.

So since as it has been shown all the possible ways of explaining hit/it variation do not suit another hypothesis is put forward to explain the reason of h-dropping in the pronoun.

The phenomenon of h-dropping in the pronoun was peculiar for the transitional period in the history of OE on its way to MdE. At this time various changes in the prosodic structure of the language begin to occur while not being completely settled down. There emerge new positions which prohibit free syllable variation according to the length, that is e.g. only long vowels occur before the homorganic rd, nd while in the rest of the cases short vowels is the norm, similarly the open syllable is represented only by long vowels.

Uncertainty of syllabic position of 'h' was amplified by the predominant atonic nature of the pronoun. In the sentences the majority of cases have weak stress thus approaching the status of clitics (mainly syntactic function). In our empirical material 'it' is accompanied by other clitics and together with them creates clitic chains which could be perceived as an intact prosodic complex. Thus out of 162 examples in 45 cases 'it' is preceded by biphonemic word – 33 examples are presented with the /-CV-/, structure (such words as he, so, be, hi, heo, go, þu, þe, þo) and 12 examples employ /-VC-/ structure (ic, if, an etc). Frequently the pronoun is followed by the potentially atonic or weakly stressed biphonemic word represented by prepositions, adverbs, particles, pronouns (into, on, to, her, me, swa, þe, ne, are). Thus about the third of the 'it' examples are characterized by the /-CV VC-/ structure.

It is common knowledge that OE had such pairs of words as feorh, mearh, Wealh, sulh – fēores, mēaras, Wēalas, sūla. The process of spirant loss and compensatory lengthening in these words are regarded by some scholars as alternation of prosodic structures /(C)V:/, /(C)VC/ and /(C)VCV/ which were equal units. The syllable boundary in these words always came after these complexes, e.g. Goth. *sō-keis, was-jis, wan-deis, miki-leis*.

Biphonemic units preceding the pronoun could have either short or long vowel. So during the prosodic reorganization if the syllable boundary was perceived after the /-CV-/ complex then it turned to be in the open syllable where the vowel due to new prosodic features was lengthened – 'he it on vnker', 'buten he it her þe', 'he it willeth þat, fre þo it ihernen'. In other cases the previous structure retained – 'þæt heo hit onwenden', 'he hit wrat', 'he hit gebete'. The change of syllable boundary and final vowel lengthening of the biphonemic word led to the change of syllable complex /(C)VC/ for the "long by nature" syllable /(C)V:/. So the origin of pronoun variation could be explained as a result of prosodic complex variation of /(C)VC/ and /(C)V:/ equal to the processes described in Gothic.

These developments seem to have taken place first of all in /-CV-/ structures where the vowel length could be perceived more clearly against the background of prosodic structure instability. This statement finds its support in the frequent use of 'it' in this kind of structures.

Equality of /(C)V:/, /(C)VC/ и /(C)VCV/ structures can be regarded as a kind of metrical resolution. For example in the OE wine, sunu where /VCV/ is a single metrical unit while /VVCV/ and /VCCV/ can be taken as two syllables. This phenomenon is frequently employed in the poetry. The nature of this kind of variation as well as /(C)V:/, /(C)VC/ and /(C)VCV/ variation reflect the peculiarities of the rhythmical partitioning of the speech articulation and appear to be a specific way of speech organization. Thus in the examples

...ic hit ðider selle, ðe... (Ch 1482, Harnd 2)

...so ic it richtlike...(Ch 1519, Whitelock34)

'ic hit' constitute two metrical units which correspond to the general metrical partitioning of this extract. The other words also make up two metrical units with its lift and drop – 'ðider, selle'. Since the stress fell on the first syllable the second one remained unstressed (– ◡) then it is but natural that among the two pronouns the first one got the stress, i.e. 'ic'. Thus the remaining spirant made up for creating the /VCCV/ complex. In the second example 'ic it' create one metrical unit /VCVC/ which alternates with CV: – CV: VCVC CV: CCCVCV. If the unit retained /h/ it could entail the overall change of the syllable boundary structure.

As far as other pronouns are concerned (him, hine etc.) which occur in the same prosodic structures but do not reveal h-dropping it should be pointed to the fact that these pronouns carry

greater stress. This fact leads to fixing the syllable boundary and thus excludes all the possibilities of any boundary blurring and moving to which /h/ was very sensitive.