

ON VARIATION OF OLD ENGLISH 'HIT'-'IT' PRONOUNS¹

Vladimir A. Bondar

Saint-Petersburg Institute for Linguistic Research

Within the pronominal system of Old English the 3 p. sg. neuter anaphoric pronoun 'hit' occupies a special place. In some particular Old English texts it is represented by its h-less variant, i.e. 'it'.

The problem of 'h-variation' in English has been the subject of many studies where h-omission and 'h-insertion' are analyzed predominantly from a sociolinguistic angle (cp. e.g. Milroy 1983). Though this much-disputed problem enkindles such an acute interest many aspects of 'h-variation' still lack resolution. Thus, for example, scholars still disagree on the dating of the phenomenon. Many researchers believe that initial 'h-omission' can be dealt with only referring to the XVIIth –XVIIIth centuries. Others agree with William Skeat who thought that instable spelling of 'h' was typical of the Middle English period and thus can be accounted for by the influence of Normans on Anglo-Saxon orthographic tradition (Milroy 1983 : 43-45). It is of course indisputable that unsteady spelling conventions caused the rise of chaos in spelling of words with initial 'h' and Normans here certainly played a part. But nonetheless all the cases of initial 'h-omission' cannot be explained just merely and exceptionally by the influence of Normans. This hypothesis is contradicted by several facts. Firstly, during the Norman Conquest 'h-omission' was not typical of French not to mention the Anglo-Norman dialect which was equally influenced by Anglo-Saxon. Martina Häcker opines that «not until 1673 did the Académie Française comment on the sloppy speech of the people of "d'outre Loire" (the other side of the Loire) and of Paris, who no longer pronounced <h> in words that do not derive from Latin, and regretted the spreading of that bad habit» (Häcker 2004 : 111). Even in the present-day Norman dialect initial 'h' is still pronounced and its reflexes are sporadically present in standard French (ibid.). Secondly, in the charters issued by king William the I only three examples of 'it' are attested. The rest are in the form of 'hit'. At the same time it is common knowledge that a lot of words that reveal 'h-variation' including initial 'h-omission' are found in Old English texts written long before the Norman Conquest. In particular, examples with the use of inorganic 'h' can be traced in Epinal and Erfurt glosses². Thus the presence of cases with 'h-less' forms where one should expect initial 'h' in the earliest Old English texts prompts us to state that 'h-omission' was not a rare phenomenon during that time and that it could really take place not only in Middle English but in Old English as well. Moreover this process could presumably spread to the pronominal paradigm and thus reveal itself in the origin of a new variant of the anaphoric pronoun of the 3 p. sg. neuter.

All this taken together it is but natural to posit some questions and namely, why precisely does this form show initial 'h-dropping', what environment contributed to this phenomena and then what are the reasons which led to variation of the pronominal forms in Old English?

The sampling for our analysis has been taken from the Old English corpus of texts kindly provided by the Oxford Text Archive. The material analyzed includes 125 examples of

¹ I am deeply indebted to Nikolai Kazansky, Yuriy Kleiner, Yuriy Kuzmenko, and Dmitriy Erofeevsky for their valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper. I am also grateful to Claire Bigg for correcting stylistic errors.

² Hildegard L. C. Tristram believes that the main reason for 'h-dropping' in Old English was language contact. "My view is that h-dropping is a transfer feature from Low Latin as spoken in the British Lowlands at the time of the advent of the Anglo-Saxons. The language shift by the large bulk of the population which took place under Anglo-Saxon domination was from Low Latin to Old English" (written communication)

'it' found in the Anglo-Saxon charters, 17 examples of 'it' in Anglo-Saxon chronicles ('it' examples are restricted exclusively by the E manuscript (Peterborough Chronicle, Second Continuation), all the other manuscripts contain 'hit'). The following texts use 'it' only one time: one of the texts of Lives of Saints by Aelfric, [ÆLS (Maur)] Ælfric: Saint Maur (Skeat I, 148-68), one of Aethelstan's law [LawAsAlm] Laws of England: Æthelstan Almsgiving (Liebermann 148), one of records [Rec 26.4] The Northamptonshire Geld Roll (Robertson 1956, App. I, no. 3), two liturgy texts [Lit 2] Forms for Use at the Visitation of the Sick (Ker 1957, 264) and [Lit 4.5] Prayers at Tierce (Banks 1965, 209-13), Invention of the Cross [LS 5] (InventCrossNap) Invention of the Cross (Napier 1894, 2-34), and in one of the Rushworth Gospels glosses [MkGl (Ru)] The Rushworth Gospels (Mk) (Skeat 1871-87, 9-135).

It is worth noting that other anaphoric pronouns of all genders singular and plural have no 'h-less' counterparts with the exception of one runic inscription on the Gold-ring. The text of the inscription reads 'Garmvnd mec ah im [Inscr 6] Bodsham Gold-Ring (Okasha 55, no. 13). Here one can presume that 'im' could stand for 'him' (cp. Koopman 1990 : 125). But in fact such suppositions do not hold true. Even if 'im' is really an anaphoric pronoun which is rather doubtful from the point of view of the meaning of the text, then it should be borne in mind that we are dealing here with a runic inscription. In that case 'h-omission' before 'im' should be regarded as a reflection of runic spelling convention, i.e. the realization of the rule according to which one of the two successive 'h' graphemes was omitted on the boundaries of two words: ah (h)im.

If we look at the paradigm of anaphoric pronouns both singular and plural we notice that initial 'h' is present in all pronouns of all genders: he, heo, hit, him, hine, hire, hie etc. So the question of whether this initial 'h' is etymologically original is bound to arise. In general Germanic anaphoric pronouns³ can go back to various Indo-European pronominal deictic stems (cp. Prokosch 1939). As far as the 3 p.sg. masculine pronoun 'he' is concerned scholars have controversial hypotheses with regard to its origin. A widespread view was that 'he' goes back to the IE form *ki- which seems to be rather disputable since in this case a transition from the sphere of the first person deixis (Ich-Deixis) to the third person deixis (Jener-Deixis) should be assumed. Although theoretically this is not at all impossible, still Germanic languages do not provide us with any evidence of this kind of transition and thus taking this pre-form for granted should be avoided. As noted by Elmar Seebold "der übliche Anschluß an idg. *ki- 'dieser hier' ...kommt nicht in Frage, weil *ki- auch im Germanischen eindeutig ich-deiktische Funktion hat" (Seebold 1984 : 65). Elmar Seebold in his turn opines that the Old English pronoun 'he' could be the result of contamination of two forms *ke-+*e- (Seebold 1984 : 66). He notes that this anaphoric pronoun was certainly a second formation "es handelt sich dabei ziemlich sicher um eine sekundäre Veränderung, nicht um eine ursprüngliche Formation (wie bei hann), weil das alte Anaphoricum keine Verbindung von der erwähnten Art eingegangen zu sein scheint (ibid.). Klingenschmitt 1987 reconstructs the Proto-Germanic form as *χaiz<χa+iz or *χai+iz, where χa goes back to IE *ko- or *koi- (Klingenschmitt 1987 : 173). Rosenfeld 1955a and Rosenfeld 1955b suggest that the Anglo-Saxon 'he' goes back to the same pre-form as the Gothic 'is', i.e. to *is/es and Proto-Germanic **e without initial 'h' which was later taken from words such as those presented in OHG hiutu, OS hindag 'today' or OE her 'here' (cp. e.g. Rosenfeld 1955b: 88-89). The problem with the reconstruction of the 3 p. sg. masculine pronoun and its initial phoneme still remains but in regard to most of Germanic neuter forms it is to be noticed that they lack initial 'h' and can be with greater certainty reconstructed as *id (cp. e.g. Gothic 'ita', Feist 1936). This allows us to state that the forms of West-Germanic languages go back to the same pre-form which was devoid of initial 'h'. Later this initial 'h' spread presumably from the masculine form to the rest of the forms

³ On the problems of anaphor in some old languages see Klein 1996: 36 et passim.

within the paradigm⁴ and in Old English even in the feminine form initial 's' was replaced by 'h'.

So during the pre-Old English period the anaphoric pronoun sg. neuter was characterized by its 'h-less' form. This statement can also be proved by the examples from Old Saxon where in oblique cases we have 'h-less' forms— e.g. nom. sg. neuter 'it' and nom. sg. feminine *sia*. Initial 'h' in Old English spread along the paradigm later and was firmly established there. Thus during the early literary period we encounter exceptionally 'hit'.

As far as the phonological status of the phoneme is concerned many scholars believe that initial 'h' in Old English was evidently a pharyngeal sound, a *Hauchlaut* (cp. Liberman 1967, Sievers/Brunner 1951, Wright 1934). Moulton 1954 considers /h/ to be a phoneme characterized by glottality but not velarity. This characteristic feature was typical not only of this phoneme in the initial position but in the medial position between two voiced as well. This idea is proved by voicing of voiceless spirants in the medial position. According to Moulton 1954 this phenomenon led not to the transition of /h/ to /g/, but to its loss, i.e. to the phonological zero (/0/). The absence of velar features in /h/ has made Moulton come to the conclusion that this phoneme has a separate status and was used in the following positions: /C-/, /LCV/, /RCV/, /VCV/. In the last three positions the fall of 'h' began already in the early Old English as a result of general voicing of medial voiceless spirants. (Moulton 1954 : 26). The process of 'h-omission' took place not only in Old English. In Scandinavian dialects 'h' fell off almost in all positions with the exception of the initial position. (e.g. 'hann' – 'he'). But in Old English 'h' in the initial position fell off only before 'l', 'n', 'r', 'w' (e.g. OE '(h)laford' (ModE lord), '(h)ring' (ModE ring), 'hwæt' (ModE what). 'H-omission' before liquids and nasals is typical of early and late Northumbrian texts (Sievers/Brunner 1951 : 195). Thus the Germanic pharyngeal spirant is characterized by some phonological instability, which easily leads to its loss in certain positions. According to the charter of M. Halle, G. Fant and R. Jakobson /h/ is neither a vowel nor a consonant and has only one feature and namely that of tension as against more diversified characteristics of other spirants (Liberman 1967 : 110). Thus on its way to phonological zero /h/ should lose only one differentiating feature in contrast to phonologically more compete spirants. So this phonological characteristic of /h/ can be the background against which the process of 'h' omission took place. But at the same time it does not provide an explanation for the problem of 'h-omission', neither does the slackness of articulatory basis. The best these explanations can do is transcribe the problem into the terms of phonology which is not an explanation in itself.

Now let us move to the examples from our corpus and discuss the hypotheses propounded to explain the problem of 'h-omission' in pronominal forms. Our attention will be focused predominantly on the royal charters and writs as well as on the examples from the Anglo-Saxon chronicle manuscript E (Peterborough Chronicle). The rest of the examples are rather sporadic and cannot be used as certain evidence and proof of the reasons of 'h-omission'. Anglo-Saxon charters also need very careful handling since many of them can be later fakes or copies carried out centuries later after the date of their issue and thus reflect peculiarities of various stages of Middle English. As an example of a spurious charter king Aethelstan's charter to the abbacy of St. John Beverley may be taken. The researchers consider this charter to be a fake made up only in the XIVth century. Thus 'hit-it' variation in this charter reflects the peculiarities of the Middle English variation of the pronouns and cannot serve as a reliable source for confirming our hypothesis of the reasons of 'hit-it'

⁴ It should be noted that the spread of 'h' to other forms of the paradigm has been most radically carried out in Old English and Old Frisian where initial 'h' is present in all forms with the exception of OFr gen. sg. masculine (*sin*), es. Old Saxon has forms identical to OE in nom. sg. *hi*, *he*, *hie*; other Old Saxon forms are without initial 'h' (Seebold 1984 : 61-62). OHG has 'h-less' pronouns along the whole paradigm (with the exception of Frank. nom. sg. masculine 'her').

variation. Generally among all the charters with ‘it’ we have found 9 charters with stylistics and contents which raise doubts as for their authenticity. These charters have not been used in our analysis.

But despite this fact there exist a number of charters with ‘it’ whose authenticity is beyond any doubt. They were written in the X-XIth centuries. The majority of charters (15 charters) date back to the epoch of king Edward the Confessor (1042-1066). One example of ‘it’ can be found in one of the charters by king Alfred the Great (al so it stant [Ch 357] (Robertson 1956, no. 13), which goes back to the year of 871 or 877. But D. Whitelock regards it as a fake, and S. Keynes and M. Lapidge call it plainly spurious. Thus we can state that the first record of ‘it’ refers to the end of the Old English period or to the transition period closer towards the beginning of Middle English⁵. As for geographical distribution of ‘hit’ and ‘it’ it should be mentioned that judging exclusively from the evidence found in charters it is rather difficult to make up an accurate map of the areas where ‘it’ firstly emerged and in which direction it then spread. The problem gets even more complicated by the fact that scribes could come from various parts of the kingdom and be the bearers of various dialects bringing certain features of their own dialect into another one. Thus with unstable spelling conventions this could find its way in mixture of various dialectal forms (cf. e.g. Mercian influence traced in the early West-Saxon texts or manuscript T of West-Saxon Bede’s version of the “History of English People” which abounds in Anglian forms – Sprockel 1965 : XXVI). But in spite of these difficulties it is still possible to make some generalizations on the basis of evidence retrieved from the charters. The majority of charters with ‘it’ were written in the eastern and south-eastern regions of England where ‘it’ by that time was most probably beginning to spread. Geographical distribution of the variants which was in embryo during the late Old English period then found its clear-cut manifestation in the Middle English period. This fact is well traced in the Linguistic Atlas of Late Middle English – LALME. As Stephen Howe noted “...although both ‘it’ and ‘hit’ are found in several areas, generally the ‘h’ form is dominant in the western side of England, while the h-less ‘it’ covers the eastern side of the country”⁶ (Howe 1996 : 140).

In the northern dialects i.e. in Northumbrian and Mercian, in its turn, there was evidently no ‘h-less’ variant. One exception is an example from the Rushworth Gospels, [Mark 14:44]:

“Dederat autem traditor eius signum eis dicens quemcumque osculatus fuero ipse est tenete eum et ducite gisalde ðonne ðe sellend his tacun him cweðende swa hwelcne swa ic cyssende ic biom he **it** is haldas hine & gihlædað”.

‘H-variation’ in the north bore a specific character. Thus, Martina Häcker opines that in the early period (in the VII th -VIII th centuries) ‘h-omission’ and ‘h-insertion’ were not typical of the Northumbrian dialect. In the later period (in the Xth-XI th centuries) a quantity of words with ‘h-insertion’ increases greatly, while the examples with ‘h-omission’ are still

⁵ There exist various opinions on the problem of division between two periods in the history of English i.e. between Old and Middle English. According to traditional views, the Norman Conquest can roughly be considered to be the divide between Old and Middle English. A. Lutz divided the history of English into two periods on the basis of communicative change of the language which according to her took place during the period from the end of thirteenth to fifteenth century (Tristram 2004 : 105-106). K. Malone in turn believes that the transition period from Old to Middle English was the tenth century (Mitchell 1985 : § 15).

⁶ S. Howe, however, makes a reservation that this geographical distribution of the pronominal forms can hardly be evidence for their dialectal distribution since on the one hand, for example, the word *hundred* does not show ‘h-omission’ at all, and, on the other hand, the contemporary use of the pronominal form with initial ‘h’ in the dialects does not coincide with the areas of *hit* distribution during the Middle English period (ibid.).

rare. They are mainly restricted to the most frequent unstressed functional words⁷ (Häcker 2004 : 112). But in spite of these changes the spirant in ‘hit’ remains unchanged in various positions. In this connection it is worth mentioning that in Northumbrian ‘h-omission’ in intervocalic positions in some words did not take place e.g. ‘tēar’ – Nrth. ‘tæhher’ < *teahur (*tahur) – ‘tear’ or ‘ēar’ – Nrth. ‘æhher’ – ‘ear’, in contrast to West-Saxon (Wright 1934 : 172). This fact could be regarded as a circumstantial evidence of peculiarities of prosodic structure variation in various dialects which will be considered closer later on the basis of ‘hit-it’ variation.

Examples from the Peterborough chronicle refer to the XII century. Among 219 cases of ‘hit’ there are 17 examples of ‘it’: A.D. 1128 (1 example), A.D. 1129 year (1 example), A.D. 1132 year (2 example), A.D. 1135 year (3 example), A.D. 1137 year (8 example), A.D. 1140 year (2 example). The majority of ‘it’ examples are in the second part of the chronicle (Second Continuation) written by the second hand as compared to the First Continuation written by another scribe. Thus the scribe of the Second Continuation came presumably from that area (evidently not northern) where by the end of the XIIth century ‘hit-it’ variation had already existed which found its reflection in the manuscript.

How could the origin of ‘h-less’ variant be explained? On the one hand, some examples of ‘h-omission’ can be accounted for by Latin influence, and on the other hand they can be treated as a result of dittography, i.e. the influence of the neighboring graphemes on the word form under consideration. But from our point of view these two aspects cannot be applied with regard to ‘hit-it’ variation. First of all, if one looks at Aelfric’s «Grammar» he will find that for Latin ‘ille’, ‘illa’ Old English ‘he’, ‘heo’ are used, but for ‘illud’ the demonstrative pronoun ‘þæt’. Besides, Latin demonstrative pronoun ‘id’, which could somehow influence the origin of ‘it’, in «Grammar» is equaled to Old English ‘þæt’, while Latin ‘is’ and ‘ea’ are translated as ‘se’ and ‘seo’, i.e. by demonstrative pronouns as well. And finally, the fact that such works translated from Latin as Boethius’ «De consolatione philosophiae», Orosius’s «Historiarum adversus paganos», Gregory’s «Cura Pastoralis» and «Dialogi» and others use exclusively ‘hit’.

Dittography cannot be regarded here as the cause of ‘h-omission’ either. The examples of dittography were meticulously analyzed by Donald Scragg. Among the cases of dittography he mentions some pronouns but predominantly possessive, e.g. ‘his’. The author does not include any example of the 3 p.sg. neuter pronoun. Actually we might look at the following example as the case of dittography – gänge **it** into (Ch 1483, Whitelock 2). But then many sentences where ‘it’ is encompassed by words with final or initial ‘h’ are left without any explanation:

- ‘buten he **it here**’ (Ch 1525, Whitelock 37-8),
- ‘so ic **it her** hire’ (Ch 1531, Whitelock 31),
- ‘al se **ich it habbe**’ (Ch 342 (Rob 12),
- ‘self **it her**’ (Ch 1483, Whitelock 2),
- ‘so ic **it her** hire’ (Ch 1531, Whitelock 31).

These examples prove that dittography played no role in ‘h-omission’. Of special interest is the following example ‘lofard it hem vthe’ (Ch 1521, Whitelock 29), where ‘it’ is preceded by the word without initial ‘h’ (OE ‘hlaford’ > ‘laford’ > ModE ‘lord’), and is followed by another 3 p. pl. pronoun ‘hem’ (ModE ‘them’) with initial ‘h’.

The influence of Celtic orthographic tradition should also be discarded. Though the influence of Celtic was great, Old English northern dialects where this influence was most prominent, show no traces of ‘h-omission’ in ‘hit’ as we have already seen.

⁷ As an example of functional words the pronoun *his* is provided. Indeed, it is used without initial ‘h’ in various positions (cp. Scragg 1970). The rest of the available texts written in the northern dialect exclusively show the use of the pronoun *hit*.

Otto Jespersen thinks that 'hit-it' variation depended on the previous word whether it ended on vowel or consonant: "From the 16th c. it established as the only form...and for some time both hit and it were found, the latter chiefly after a consonant" (Jespersen 1909 : 60). But our material shows that 'hit-'it' variation was not caused by the last phoneme of the preceding word. Thus out of 157 cases of 'it' 87 are used after /C/, and after /V/ we have 42 examples. And what is more among 87 cases 43 are represented by one and the same set expression, and namely 'þat it cymð' represented by different orthographic variants. So we have actually 44 examples of 'it' used after /C/ versus 42 after /V/. The quantity of 'hit' examples after the conjunction *þat* by far outnumbers those with 'it'. Thus we can state that the frequency of 'hit' and 'it' after consonants and vowels is equal. It is interesting to note that the same equal quantitative distribution is traced with regard to 'hit' distribution: out of 931 examples of 'hit' 591 are used after /C/ and 340 are used after /V/. Otto Jespersen's statement can be applied to the Middle English period, which is proved by the examples from the Anglo-Saxon Peterborough chronicle where out of 17 examples of 'it' only two are used after the vowel of the preceding word: 'Cristendom swa it næfre ær ne wæs' and '& æure it was uerse'. In the rest of the examples 'it' is used after the consonant.

Thus none of the hypotheses mentioned above can be regarded as suitable for the explanation of 'h-omission' in 'hit'. All of them fail to explain the reasons for the origin of variation of the two pronouns.

What we suggest is to look at this phenomenon from the angle of peculiarities of syllable relations in Old English and regard this phenomenon as triggered by internal peculiarities in the development of English.

Generally speaking, 'h-omission' depended on peculiarities of syllabification, on the position in syllables which 'h' occupied. According to Suzuki 1985 «/h/-Deletion can be most appropriately characterized as a syllable-sensitive process, where ambisyllabicity plays a determining role» (Suzuki 1985 : 104). As a proof of the statement the author provides such Old English examples as 'eorod' < *eohrād⁸ (troop), 'slēan' < *slahan (to kill) and others where due to uncertain boundary position of 'h' it fell off in contrast to such words as 'behindan' (behind), 'behealdan' (to behold), where 'h' was definitely syllable initial and thus retained. In this statement the most important thing is that 'h-omission' is a syllable-sensitive process.

As we have already noted 'h-omission' in the 'hit' pronoun was typical rather of the transition period of Old English on its way to the Middle English period (the Xth-XIth centuries). At this moment new changes appear not only in the sphere of phonology and morphology but in the prosodic structure of the language as well. At the same time these changes have not been well established. From our point of view these changes and instability of the prosodic structure should be regarded as the driving force behind 'h-omission' in the 'hit' pronoun. Thus, in the sphere of prosody new positions emerge which prohibit free variation of length – e.g. before such clusters as 'rd', 'nd' only long vowel is used while other clusters allow the use of short vowels, the vowel in the open syllable tends to be long while in early Old English in open syllables either short or long vowel could be used (Lieberman 1966, Kuzmenko 1991).

Uncertainty of syllable position of 'h' in 'hit' was also due to predominant unstressed or low stressed nature of the pronoun. In a sentence it had generally secondary stress or was devoid of stress performing thus the role of a clitic. (Koopman 1990 : 125). It should also be mentioned that 'hit' is almost always used with other unstressed functional words and thus was presumably perceived as an intact whole prosodic complex together with preceding and

⁸ In the etymological dictionary of Old English by F. Holthausen this word is traced back to the pre-form *eoh-rād 'Reiterei' where two words are clearly hyphenated (Holthausen 1934 : 92). It is probable that during some period in its development this word was originally perceived as a compound consisting of two different words with a firm syllable boundary after the first word with 'h' in syllable final position.

following words which also functioned as clitics. Thus the structure of the pronoun could depend on the distribution of length and syllable boundary within this whole prosodic complex of clitics. Out of 162 examples in 45 cases ‘it’ is preceded by a monosyllabic word among which 33 are represented by the /CV/ structure (here we have such words as ‘he’, ‘so’, ‘be’, ‘hi’, ‘go’, ‘þu’, ‘þe’, ‘þo’) and 12 cases of /VC/ structure, (such word as ‘ic’, ‘if’, ‘an’). Very often the pronoun is followed by potentially unstressed or low-stressed word, represented by prepositions, adverbs, particles, pronouns (‘into’, ‘on’, ‘to’, ‘her’, ‘me’, ‘swa’, ‘þe’, ‘ne’, ‘are’). In other positions, where ‘hit’ is used as an impersonal subject followed by the predicate expressed by verb, no ‘h-omission’ is found. For example, in such expressions as ‘hit gelamp’ (it happened) or hit sniwð (it snows) in our corpus of texts only hit is used.

Thus about one third of examples on ‘it’ are characterized by /-CV VC-/ structure which emerged from the /-CV (C) VC-/ structure with intervocalic (C) represented by ‘h’ later omitted. This structure is identical to /VCV/ > /V:/ structure in Moulton’s scheme where /C/ also stands for ‘h’.

It is common knowledge that in Old English one can find such pairs of words as nom. sg. feorh, mearh, Wealh, sulh – gen sg. fēores, mēaras, Wēalas, sūla. Processes of ‘h-omission’ and compensatory lengthening are considered by some scholars, e.g. Yurij Kleiner, to be an alternation of prosodic structures /(C)V:/ and /(C)VC/, which in Old Germanic languages were equal units (Kleiner 1999 : 181 et passim). Thus Yurij Kleiner regards such prosodic variants as combinatory. The syllable boundary in these words was always after these prosodic units just like in Gothic ‘sō-keis’, ‘was-jis’ and ‘wan-deis’. Since monosyllables which preceded ‘hit’ could bear either a long or short vowel, the syllable boundary within these clusters of clitics with ‘hit’ could undergo the same process as in *feorh* – *fēores*: if the syllable boundary was after /CV/ then the syllable became open and was afterwards lengthened:

- ‘he it on vnker’ [Ch 1531] (Whitelock 31);
- ‘buten he it her þe’ [Ch 1537] (Whitelock 27);
- ‘he it willeth þat’ [Ch 1608] (Hart);
- ‘fre þo it ihernen’ [Ch 1528] (Whitelock 25).

As a result of ‘h-omission’ and lengthening of the preceding vowel the structure came to be similar to the Gothic ‘sō-keis’ where the first syllable was «long by nature». In passing it is to be noticed that from the diachronic perspective this phenomenon finds its parallel in the process which took place in words like *slēan* < **slahan*, where ‘h-omission’ was accompanied by lengthening of the preceding vowel.

In other cases the previous structure with short vowel and initial ‘h’ in the pronoun retained:

- ‘þæt heo hit onwenden’ [Ch 98] (Robertson 1956, no. 1);
- ‘he hit wrat’ [Ch 98] (Robertson 1956, no. 1);
- ‘he hit gebete’ [Ch 218] (Harmer 1914, no. 12).

The change of syllable boundary and lengthening of the last phoneme in the monosyllabic words led to the change of one syllable unit, i.e. /(C)VC/ for the other, that one with long final vowel /(C)V:/, “long by nature”. Thus we can state that the use of ‘it’ and its variation with ‘hit’ can be treated as prosodic structures variation, i.e. variation of /(C)VC/ and /(C)V:/ structures.

This process of ‘h-omission’ seemingly took place first of all in /CV/ structures where the length of vowels under the circumstances of prosodic instability was probably felt most distinctly. This is proved by relatively frequent use of ‘it’ in this kind of structures. It is interesting to note that ‘h-omission’ took place also in the /LCV/ and /RCV/ complexes just like in separate words, e.g. ‘fer(a)he’ and ‘fel(a)han’:

- ‘strem til it shutt’ Ch 909 (Kem 709);

‘ðer it er aras’ Ch 1594 (Kem 1355);
‘cyrder it norð on’ Ch 850 (Kem 641) .

It is necessary to mention another point which could also be at play while dealing with ‘h-omission’ in ‘hit’ pronoun. The equality of /(C)V:/ and /(C)VC/ can be regarded as resolution, a metrical device, according to which two successive short syllables are equaled to one long syllable (e.g. Kleiner 1999 : 183; Suzuki 1985 : 102). The following words can serve as examples of resolution – wine (friend), sunu (son), in which /-VCV-/ is one metrical unit. The /-VVCV-/ and /-VCCV-/ structures are considered to be two syllables consisting of lift and sink (Suzuki 1985 : 102). One may argue that this phenomenon is employed exclusively in poetry while we are dealing with prosaic works. But we think that this poetic device could be actually applied to some charters, and precisely those pieces where we have some set expressions, clichés, rhythmically organized chains of word. It should also be mentioned that some charters are written in an alliterative poetic form (e.g. a number of charters by king Eadwig). Such clichés are used almost in all charters:

‘so ic *it formist ahte*’ (CH 1490, Whitelock 28);
‘oð *hit cymð* æft to þæs abbodes byrig’ (Ch 381, Birch 629).

Thus judging from this angle we should say that the position and the structure of the pronoun depended on the rhythmical segmentation of such clichés, on the distribution and alternation of long and short vowels. For example:

‘ic hit ðider selle, ðe’ (Ch 1482, Harnd 2)
‘so ic it richtlike’ (Ch 1519, Whitelock34)

In the first example ‘*ic hit*’ constitutes two metrical units which corresponds to the general metrical segmentation of this extract since the other words also made up two metrical units with its lift and sink – ðider, selle. Since the stress fell on the first syllable the second one remained unstressed (– ◡) then it is but natural that out of two pronouns the first one got the stress, i.e. ic. Thus the retention of the spirant made up for creating the /VCCV/ complex. In the second example ‘*ic it*’ creates one metrical unit /VCVC/ which alternates with CV: – CV: VCVC CV: CCCVCV. If the structure retained ‘h’ it could entail the overall change of the syllable boundary structure.

It is worth mentioning that ‘him’, ‘hine’, ‘hem’ are also used in the same prosodic structures but show no ‘h-omission’. Thus out of 213 examples with ‘him’, ‘hine’ and ‘hem’ in 141 cases these pronouns are followed by a monosyllabic word which has /CV/, /VC/, /CVC/, /CCV/ or /VCC/ structure. In the rest of the examples the pronouns are preceded by multisyllabic words. This fact of ‘h-retention’ can be accounted for by the relatively stressed nature of these pronouns. Stephen Howe remarks that ‘it’ «can only rarely be accented and in natural gender reference can occur less commonly as agent, and prop or empty it is also of course unaccented, while he and she for example are in comparison accented much more often, and that it is likely to be replaced by a demonstrative form when accented» (Howe 1996 : 140). The same concerns such pronouns as ‘him’ and ‘hine’, which are semantically more loaded and thus are much more often accented. Their stressed nature made up for creating a more clear-cut syllable boundary between the pronouns and surrounding clitics. Positional prominence of these pronouns was thus the reason why ‘h’ was not regarded as bound or dependent on the syllabic nature of the preceding or following clitics. And this, as we think, was the main reason for its retention.

Further on when initial ‘h’ was dropped and a new variant of the pronoun appeared it was first associated with specific prosodic structures but later a process similar to lexical diffusion came to the fore and the new pronominal variant spread on to other prosodic structures (Kazansky 2004 : 100-101 et passim). And only after that in the Middle English period due to sociolinguistic factors ‘it’ gained the upper hand and superseded ‘hit’ in some dialects.

To conclude it is to be said that different factors influenced the process of 'h-omission'. As noted in Milroy 1983 «we are in a similar position to the medical researcher who may be able to isolate a number of relevant factors in the aethiology of a disease but cannot specify a single cause» (Milroy 1983 : 50). In this paper we have tried to single out the only cause that was the driving force behind the origin of a new variant of the 'hit' pronoun. Not excluding all the possibilities we suppose that initial 'h-omission' depended on the instability of syllabic boundaries and length of the preceding vowels. Variation of 'hit-it' pronouns can be best described in terms of prosodic structure variation. This process took place during the late or transition period in the history of Old English.

REFERENCES

- Campbell A. Old English Grammar. Oxford, 1959.
- Häcker M. The Relationship between [h]-Insertion and [h]-Omission Revisited. – Anglistentag München. Proceedings. Ed. by Ch. Bode, S. Domsch, H. Sauer. Trier, 2003. 507-518.
- Häcker M. Intrusive [h] in Present-day English Accents and <h>-Insertion in Medieval Manuscripts (Hypercorrection or functionally-motivated Language Use?). – New Perspectives on English Historical Linguistics. Ed. by Kay, Christian J., Carole Hough, Irene Wotherspoon. Amsterdam-Philadelphia, 2004. Vol. II: Lexis and Transmission, 109-123.
- Holthausen F. Altenglisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch. Heidelberg, 1934.
- Howe S. The Personal Pronouns in the Germanic Languages. – Studia Linguistica Germanica, 1996, Vol. 43.
- Jespersen O. A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles. Heidelberg, 1909. Vol. 1.
- Feist S. Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der Gotischen Sprache. Leiden, 1936.
- Kazansky N. N. Sincopa v latinskom jazyke i problemy frazovoi intonacii [Syncope in Latin and the problems of phrase intonation]. – Teoreticheskiye problemy jazykoznanija [Theoretical Problems of Linguistics], 2004. 99-111.
- Klein J. Sá-figé and Indo-European Deixis. – Historische Sprachforschung, 1996. Vol. 109, № 1, 21-39.
- Kleiner Yu. A. Zakon Siversa (germanskije jazyki) [Siever's Law (Germanic Languages)]. – Jazyk i recevaja dejatel'nost' [Language and Speech Behavior]. 1999 2, 169-185.
- Klingenschmitt G. Erbe und Neuerung beim germanischen Demonstrativpronomen. – Althochdeutsch. Bd. 1: Grammatik. Glossen und Texte. Hrsg. R. Bergmann, H. Tiefenbach, L. Voetz. (Festschrift für Rudolf Schützeichel). Heidelberg, 1987. 169-189.
- Koopman W. Word Order in Old English (With Special Reference to the Verb Phrase). Amsterdam, 1990.
- Kuzmenko, Yu. K. Fonologiceskaja evoljucija germanskix jazykov. [Phonological evolution of the Germanic languages.] Leningrad: Nauka, 1991.
- Lieberman A. Obschegermanskije /h/ i nekotoryje zakonomernosti zvukovyx izmenenij [Proto-Germanic /h/ and some regularities of sound changes]. – Voprosy jazykoznanija [Problems of Linguistics]. 1967 1, 103-111.
- Lieberman A. K istorii slogodelenija v anglijskom jazyke [On the History of Syllable Division in English]. – Seminar po diachroniceskoj fonologii germanskix jazykov [Seminar on Diachronic Phonology of Germanic Languages]. Moskva: Nauka, 1966, 10-11.
- Milroy J. On the Sociolinguistic History of /h/-Dropping in English. – Current Topics in English Historical Linguistics, 1983 4, 37-53.
- Mitchell B. Old English Syntax. I, II. Oxford, 1985.

- Moulton W. G. The Stops and Spirants of Early Germanic. – *Language*, 1954. Vol. 30. № 1, 1-42.
- Prokosch E. *A Comparative Germanic Grammar*. Baltimore: Linguistic Society of America, 1939.
- Rosenfeld H.-F. Ingwäonisch he, hi und das Personalpronomen im Germanischen. – *Forschungen und Fortschritten*, 1955a. Vol. 29, № 5, 150-156.
- Rosenfeld H.-F. Ingwäonisch he, hi und das germanische Demonstrativpronomen. – *Zeitschrift für Mundartenforschung*, 1955b. Vol. 23, 74-110.
- Scragg D. G. Initial h in Old English. – *Anglia*, 1970. Vol. 88, 165-196.
- Seebold E. *Das System der Personalpronomina in den frügermanischen Sprachen: sein Aufbau und seine Herkunft*. Göttingen, 1984.
- Sievers E./Brunner K. *Altenglische Grammatik*. Halle (Saale), 1951.
- Sprockel C. *The Language of the Parker Chronicle (vol. I, Phonology and Accidence)*. 'S-Gravenhage Martinus Nijhoff, 1965.
- Suzuki S. The Role of Syllable Structure in Old English Poetry. – *Lingua*, 1985 67, 97-119.
- Tristram H. L. C. Diglossia in Anglo-Saxon England, or What was Spoken Old English Like? – *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, 2004 40, 87-110.