

The Northern Subject Rule in Middle English dialects: individual syntactic constructions

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The Northern Subject Rule (NSR) can be illustrated with the sentences *they run and hides* and *children hides*. It is typically analysed as a combination of two conditions on present-tense inflection: the subject condition (under which pronoun subjects trigger different inflection than full noun phrase subjects) and the adjacency condition (under which the special inflection with pronoun subjects is only triggered when verb and subject are adjacent).

However, in present-day English NSR dialects, non-pronominal plural subjects do not uniformly affect verbal inflection. Noun phrases headed by quantifiers and relative pronouns trigger more non-standard -s inflection than simple noun phrases do (Buchstaller, Corrigan, Holmberg & Maguire 2013), and so do conjoined noun phrases (cf. Montgomery, Fuller & DeMarse 1993, Godfrey & Tagliamonte 1999, Beal & Corrigan 2000, McCafferty 2003). The adjacency condition is often absent in present-day NSR dialects (Pietsch 2005), and, where it persists, may in fact be found only in conjoined verb phrases (*they run and hides*). De Haas (2011) has found that there was variation in the presence and strength of both conditions even in early Middle English NSR dialects, but the question remains what roles individual syntactic constructions played in these dialects.

This paper will present a detailed syntactic analysis of early Middle English data from a corpus of localized early Middle English texts from Northern England and the Northern Midlands (from LAEME), and integrate it with existing findings on early and late Middle English dialects, as well as present-day varieties. The paper will also yield insight into variation and change in (Middle) English verbal inflection by plotting the locations of origin of all corpus texts on maps, indicating the strength of the NSR conditions in various locations and, to the extent that this is possible, in different time periods. It will be shown that some present-day patterns of variation have surprising time depth.