

Werner, Otmar. 1991. The incorporation of Old Norse pronouns into Middle English. Suppletion by loan. *Language Contact in the British Isles: Proceedings of the Eighth International Symposium on Language Contact in Europe*, Douglas, Isle of Man, ed. by Sture Ureland and George Broderick, 369-401. Tübingen.

The paper studies the replacement of Old English third person plural pronouns by Old Norse pronouns and the development of suppletive feminine and neuter singular forms of English third person pronouns. During its development, the English personal pronoun system had reached the stage when the number of paradigm positions had reduced and there was a lot of homophony in the paradigm. This situation favours suppletion, since the author postulates a dependency between the size of the paradigm and the number of roots it contains: “in a large paradigm it is useful to have a common root and different affixes” but the most frequent slot of the paradigm (like Nominative Singular) can be filled with a suppletive root. In a language with many grammatical categories and many members per category the large group of pronouns tend to work with a common base plus inflection; in a language with little or no inflection the small number of pronouns tend to be suppletive forms.

The history of the Middle English and Old Norse interaction is presented; it is important to note that English borrowed the Norse *þ*-base only in the plural (although this base was also represented in the singular neuter) and thus clearly marked the categorical distinction Sg vs. Pl. In Old Norse this base initially belonged to demonstrative pronouns, but English borrowed it at the stage when it had already become a personal pronoun.

The article also describes the development of suppletive *she* and *it* which is a result of “more or less unique sound changes”.

The paper claims that the principle of economy explains “changes of various origins and quite different mechanisms” better than principles of Natural Morphology.