

The Evolution of the Category of Voice in Middle Norwegian: A Case Study in Language Contact

As long as a language has active users, it is liable to undergo various changes. One of the external factors causing language change is language contact. In the late Middle Ages, Norwegian speakers were in intense language contact with Swedes, Danes, and merchants speaking Middle Low German. However, this contact was not uniform across all of Norway, particularly with the Germans. For this reason, the text material in this research will be collected from documents written in three of the largest cities: Oslo, Bergen, and Trondheim. Undoubtedly, the contact with Middle Low German was most intense in Bergen, as the Hanseatic merchants established a *Kontor* there, although they did not mix much with the locals. In contrast, Oslo intermarriages between locals and Germans were allowed, allowing children to grow up bilingual. Meanwhile, Trondheim had little to no contact with Germans. As mentioned, other Scandinavians also played a significant role in language contact in Norway, and many German influences may have entered Norwegian through these connections.

In Middle Norwegian, there were three productive grammatical voices: active, middle, and passive, while in Modern Norwegian, only active and passive are productive. There are two ways to express the passive voice in Norwegian: by using an auxiliary verb and past participle or by adding the affix *-s* to the verb. The most common way to form a passive construction is by using the auxiliary verb *bli* ('remain'), which was borrowed from Middle Low German during the Middle Ages—though in German, it never became an auxiliary verb. By tracing the evolution of the verb *bli* and the usage of the remaining two auxiliaries *vara* ('be') and *verða* ('become') in Norwegian, it may be possible to draw conclusions about the development of periphrastic passive constructions. The affix *-s* is interesting on its own, as it could be used to form active, middle, and passive constructions, though it is only productive in passive constructions today.

While the language contact in Norway has been broadly researched, it has mostly been synchronic rather than diachronic, and the main objective has usually been to explore loanwords. This study will have diachronic character and focus on changes in constructions. Construction Grammar, which will serve as the framework for this research, has been successfully used in diachronic studies, though it has been rarely applied to studies of language contact.

The main aim of this research is to trace the development of the voice category in the Middle Norwegian period and before (1250-1550) in light of language contact. The text material used will come from the *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, a collection of diplomas—texts with an administrative character that usually include the year and location where they were written. I expect to show differences in how the voice category was expressed in Middle Norwegian across the previously mentioned cities, with a particular focus on how language contact may have influenced these differences. Additionally, I will test the Construction Grammar framework in diachronic research on language contact.