West Germanic 2.sg. *-st* Revisited: The Role of Supervescence

The Uniformitarian Principle restrains historical linguists who are reconstructing a proto-language not only from positing typologically unattested linguistic configurations (e.g., a verb system with 2 tenses in the indicative vs. 22 in the subjunctive, or a phonological system with no low vowels at all), but also from positing typologically unattested sociolinguistic situations: e.g., a system that lacks variation, or one without any stigmatized forms. When a proto-language with stigmatized forms (due, e.g., to hypercorrection) divides into several descendant languages such that each inherits those stigma-bearing items, all the ingredients are in place for subsequent loss of the stigma to allow the forms at issue to appear late (at a time subsequent to the initial stage of attestation) in the written texts of many or even all of the descendants. This delayed appearance of once-stigmatized but later-accepted forms can be called *supervescence* [a haplologized blend of *super*+*(fer)vescence*], because it indeed involves, as it were, the bubbling up to the surface of formerly submerged forms. This phenomenon is already well-established for the attested stages of languages' histories: e.g., certain taboo-words have taken centuries to appear in print.

Joseph 2006, 2012, 2013 adduces evidence for plausible cases of such "bubbling up" in the histories of Germanic and Indo-Iranian languages, emphasizing that supervescence obviates an appeal to convergent Sapirian "drift" as an explanation for independent parallel developments in related languages. Janda & Joseph 2023 point out that supervescence (as one innovation, later multiply inherited) not only is more economical than "co-drift" (as multiple innovations, often across all descendant languages), but also is nearer to Sapir's own 1921 notion of drift — which includes several types, one of them involving the persistence and spread of patterns from a proto-language into its descendants (a parallel to pattern-persistence and -spread within one language). It must be stressed that distinct distributions and chronologies of eventually supervescent forms in different descendants of a common ancestral language are expected, because destigmatization itself is governed by sociolinguistic conditions that are unique to each descendant language.

Here, we argue that the appearance of 2.sg. *-st* (< earlier *-s*) in multiple West Germanic [WGmc.] languages is more comprehensible when analyzed as an instance of the supervescence of a once-stigmatized Proto-WGmc. [PWGmc.] form that was originally due to hypercorrection, not as an instance of co-drift whereby *-s* independently and repeatedly became *-st*. Crucially, WGmc. *-st* in OE and OHG has frequently been treated as a case of independently convergent development (cf., e.g., Greenberg 1957, Sihler 1986, Ringe 2002, Ringe & Taylor 2014), but *-st* actually appears in at least one stage of all five major WGmc. languages, hence also in both Old and Middle Frisian, Old (but not Middle) Dutch, and Middle Low German [though not (earlier) Old Saxon]. We agree fully with Greenberg 1957 (and other specialist works, such as Wilmanns 1906, Campbell 1962, Brunner 1965, Paraschkewow 2003, Braune & Reiffenstein 2004) that the pivotal hypercorrection was the addition of a /t/ after a verb-final *-s* that preceded a 2.sg. pronoun starting with *þ...* (or the like, depending on the language) — cf. OHG *gilaubist thū* < *gilaubistū* < *gilaubis thū* 'believest thou', e.g. — except that, unlike those authors, we locate this reanalysis in PWGmc. Lausberg 1972 cites a Romansch parallel: *chantast (tu)* 'singest thou' < *cantas tu*.

Sihler 1986, Ringe 2002, and Ringe & Taylor 2014 treat the inversion context *...-s + þū* as a red herring in the rise of 2.sg. *-st* in OE: they view that configuration as syntactically minor, and analyze the analogical model of OE (plus OHG) preterite-present verbs already ending in *-st* (like OE *wāst* 'thou knowest') as rendering inversion structures irrelevant. However, we show, first, that the syntactic environments where the specifically relevant inversion occurs are some of the most basic in OE, and, second, that the preterite-presents (and similar verbs) in *-st* can have been extremely relevant to the reanalysis of *-s* as *-st* without having been the SOLE reason for it. Further, given the predominant view that PWGmc. was already a V2 language, we can project the hypercorrection-related inversion back into the proto-language, along with the various verbs already marked with 2.sg. *-st* — thereby further strengthening the case for supervescence.

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