

## Experiencer Verbs and Structural Case – A Diachronic Perspective

Allen (1995, 1996) identifies a period in Early Middle English when some experiencer constructions exhibited a case-marking pattern where both the experiencer and theme arguments bear non-nominative case. An example is given in (1).

- (1) a. *swetest him ðuncheð ham*  
sweetest him-D/A thinks them-D/A (Allen 1995: 237)  
'He finds them sweetest.'  
b. *for þi ðat him areowe ow*  
for that that him-A/D pity you-A/D  
'in order that he would pity you' (Allen 1996: 10)

In (1a), the subject of the small clause complement of the experiencer verb is marked with non-nominative case; in (1b) the theme argument is non-nominative. This somewhat unusual case pattern is argued by Allen to be a regular development, and her analysis is that experiencer verbs that occur from 1200–1500 with this case pattern are structural case assigners even in the presence of a dative experiencer subject, unlike in Old English.

The goal of this paper is to present comparative data from Older Faroese and Old Swedish showing that similar case-marking patterns occur and that this supports the analysis argued for in Allen (1995, 1996). In both Old Swedish and Older and Modern Faroese, but unlike Old Norse, experiencer verbs with dative-marked experiencers appear to assign structural accusative case to the subjects of their small clause theme complements. In Older Swedish, such structural case assignment is restricted to the subject of small clause theme complements (2a) (Falk 1997). In Faroese, the pattern is more general with experiencer verbs, and is similar to the Early Middle English examples in (1).

- (2) a. *Mik thykker thik vara enn dara* me-D seems  
you-A be[-FIN] a fool  
'you seem to me to be a fool' (OSw written 1311-1312; Falk 1997: 54)  
b. *og henni tokti han singja Pater-noster ...*  
and her-D seemed him-A sing[-FIN] paternoster  
'... and he seemed to her to sing a Paternoster...' (Faroese 1832)

The existence of such constructions in Old Swedish and Older and Modern Faroese, occurring in both languages over a considerable period of time, supports Allen's analysis of Early Modern English verbs that, for a period at least, took dative experiencer arguments and were structural case assigners. Diachronic changes in the syntax and case assigning properties of this class of verbs from Old Norse through to Old Swedish and Older Faroese are compared with changes in the same class of verbs from Old to Middle English.'

### References

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