

THE ORIGIN OF THE CLITICNESS OF THE WEST GERMANIC  
DEFINITE ARTICLE: THE CASE OF *Beowulf*

The present paper is mainly concerned with the definite article of *Beowulf*. The literature about the West Germanic definite article has always allotted a prime place among the old Germanic texts to this poem: it is undisputably archaic (Kuhn 1933: 105, D. Hofmann 1959:189), and suitable for statistical generalisations. Its more than 6,000 hemistichs contain about 300 instances of the definite article (Lichtenheld 1872:332).<sup>1</sup>

Let me remind you of the long-known distinction between what Kuhn (1933:4-5) called *Satzpartikel* and *Satzteilpartikel*. Both terms refer to unaccented or weakly accented words: in broad outline, a *Satzpartikel* is a syntactic constituent at the clause level (e. g. a pronominal subject), a *Satzteilpartikel* is a constituent within a syntactic constituent at the clause level or below it (e. g. a preposition within a prepositional phrase). Concerning the *Satzpartikeln* of Germanic, Kuhn (1933:8) formulated the following *Satzpartikelgesetz*:

"Die satzpartikeln stehen in der ersten senkung des satzes, in der proklise entweder zu seinem ersten oder zweiten betonten worte."

The definite article is of course a *Satzteilpartikel*. However, as noticed by Kuhn in a cautious footnote (1933:45 fn. 1), it frequently ("gern") accompanies *Satzpartikeln* in *Beowulf*. To Kuhn's observation, I add the following specification (the spelling of the illustrations, the punctuation, and the morphological analyses of the words are taken from ed. Klaeber 1950):

1.1 Almost always when the definite article accompanies *Satzpartikeln* in *Beowulf*, the definite article immediately follows the *Satzpartikeln*, and the sequence *Satzpartikeln* + definite article stands clause-initially.

Example. 66b (georne hȳrdon,) *oðð þæt sēo geogoð gewēox* (the *Satzpartikeln* *oðð þæt* and the immediately following definite

article *sēo* before the first lift).

1.2 In 24 instances, the definite article is found immediately after a clause-initial sequence of words consisting of a finite lexical ("full") verb (accompanied by its own *Satzteilpartikeln*, if any) and of *Satzpartikeln*.

Example. 109a ne gefeah hē *pære fæde*, (ac hē hine feor for-wræc) (the *Satzpartikel* hē and the definite article *pære* after the finite verb).

1.1-2 will here be referred to as the *Satzpartikel*-usage of the definite article.

According to my count, the *Satzpartikel*-usage holds for about 70 % of the instances of the definite article in *Beowulf*, and is the most widespread usage of the definite article in the poem. It must also be the oldest usage of the definite article in *Beowulf*, for all other usages of the definite article (covering about 30 % of all instances) can be explained as the relaxation of the constraints (one or two at a time) that govern the *Satzpartikel*-usage. The constraints are,

2.1 The definite article immediately follows the *Satzpartikeln*. (This is the basic constraint, from which the remaining ones follow as consequences.)

2.2 The definite article is not used with non-first accented noun phrases of the clause (because no noun phrase can precede the *Satzpartikeln* in the clause, nor can anything intervene between the *Satzpartikeln* and the definite article).

2.3 There is only one definite article per clause (because there is only one *Satzpartikel*(cluster) per clause).

2.4 The definite article precedes the first lift of the hemistich (because the *Satzpartikeln* precede the first lift of the hemistich).

In studying the relaxations from the above constraints, it is useful to treat separately the definite articles occurring in prepositional phrases (3.1), and the remaining definite articles (3.2); a few more exceptional cases have been relegated to (3.3). Several instances are listed sub more than one item.

3.1 The definite article in prepositional phrases. The relaxation of constraint (2.1):

3.1.1 Only the preposition intervenes between the *Satzpartikeln* and the definite article. 19 instances. E. g. 192b (laþ ond longsum), þē on ǣā lēode becōm + 270a 1215b 1484a 1485b 1612a 1629a 1665a 1694a 1780a 1868a 2028a 2406a 2468a 2528a 2661a 2690a 2788a 2860a.

3.1.2 The prepositional phrase begins a hemistich which is not clause-initial. 43 instances, mostly also breaking constraint (2.2), because the first accented noun phrase stands in a preceding hemistich. E. g. 125a mid þære wulfylle (wīca nēosan) + 326b 425a 443a 617b 647a 695a 713b 824a 838a 919b 1016b 1073b 1082b 1191b 1199a 1280a 1421a 1614a 1635a 1638a 1639a 1956b 1981a 1984b 2010a 2039b 2083a 2139a 2197a 2232a 2298a 2366a 2374a 2405b 2465a 2520a 2560a 2786a 2835a 2856a 2905a 3109a.

3.1.3 The prepositional phrase is clause-initial, but the clause does not begin with *satzpartikeln*. 5 instances, e. g. 1052a on þære medubence (māpdum gesealde) + 1030a 1110a 2669a + (involving a hemistich-initial finite full verb) 2690a.

3.2 Definite articles in noun phrases outside prepositional phrases. The relaxation of constraint (2.1):

3.2.1 The noun phrase begins a hemistich which is not clause-initial. 14 instances, mostly also breaking constraint (2.2) (because the first accented noun phrase of the clause stands in a preceding hemistich). E. g. 9b (oð þæt him æghwylc) þāra ymbsittendra + 416a 707a 792a 1057a 1105a 1309a 1406a 1614b 1685a 2382a 2823a 2887a 3122b.

3.2.2 The noun phrase is clause-initial, but the clause does not begin with *satzpartikeln*. 15 instances, e. g. 107b (in Cāines cynne -) þone cwealm gewræc + 363a 639a 801b 1202a + (involving a hemistich-initial finite full verb) 311a 712a 762a 1563a 1570a 1982a 2239b 2329a 2977a 2991a.

3.3 The remaining cases. 9 clauses contain two definite articles each, thus breaking constraint (2.3), e. g. 639a Ðām wīfe þā word (wēl līcodon) + 109-10 646-7 712-3 1190-1 1614 1638-9 2587-8 2999. Constraint (2.4) is broken by 5 instances, e. g. 3011a meltan mid þām mōdigan, (ac þær is mādma hord) + 110a + (the following instances all involving sele þām hēan)

713b 919b 1984b; constraint (2.4) is also broken by 7 instances containing the postposed definite article, e. g. 2334b (ēalond ūtan,) eorðweard done + 2007b 2588a 2734b(?) 2959b 3081b. - The cases defined sub (1.2), involving a hemistich-initial finite full verb + *Satzpartikeln* + definite article, are an ancient variant of constraint (2.4), and are here not considered a violation thereof on a par with the relaxations enumerated in the present paragraph.

I now return to the *Satzpartikel*-usage of the definite article in *Beowulf*.

The *Satzpartikel*-usage of the definite article has nothing inevitable about it, seeing that the usage of the definite article in *Beowulf* is optional anyhow (Barnouw 1902), witness, for instance, the rarity of the otherwise expected definite articles in A-, D-, and E-hemistichs. (The *Satzpartikeln* were above all used in the "light" B- and C-hemistichs, cf. Hinderschiedt 1979; the same holds true of the *Satzpartikel*-usage of the definite article.) Therefore, the abundant *Satzpartikel*-usage requires an explanation. However, the latter is not the object of the present paper, and I confine myself to the following remarks to illustrate what use of the definite article was so similar to the use of the *Satzpartikeln* as to justify the article's place next to them. Hodler (1954:29-32) posited, among the earliest uses of the definite article, what he called *der satzverknüpfende Artikel* (i. e. article whose special function it is to join clauses together), noticing that it can stand only before the subject of discourse, normally before the subject noun phrase. (My addition: as many as 50 % of all definite articles in *Beowulf* introduce subject noun phrases.) The most recent treatment of the Germanic definite article, Moskalskaja 1977, considers (253-4) the early definite article to be very probably a syntactic particle accompanying nouns, true enough, but playing the role of a "suprasyntactic" means in the logical and communicative structure of the text, most often signalling the theme of the clause. (Hodler and Moskalskaja did not study the position of the definite article with respect to *Satzpartikeln*, but arrived at their respective views investigating the semantics of the de-

finite article, especially in Gothic.)

I now come to the mostly neglected problem as to how the definite article (whose source, a demonstrative pronoun, received the normal word accent) became clitical. I believe that it was the *Satzpartikel*-usage that triggered what the definite article, being a function word, presumably aspired to anyhow, namely almost permanent unaccentedness.

Given the already mentioned archaicness of *Beowulf*, it can be assumed that the usage of the definite article in the poem reflects the earliest usage of the Old English definite article that can be observed (Lichtenheld 1872:332-3). Hence my postulate that the *Satzpartikel*-usage is the oldest usage of the definite article in *Beowulf* implies that the *Satzpartikel*-usage is the very earliest accessible usage of the Old English definite article. For a time it was probably even the only usage of the definite article in Old English. In those days, the definite article ALWAYS stood next to the *Satzpartikeln*, and in the permanent vicinity of those light elements, I believe, lost its word accent through assimilation to the lack/weakness of word accent in the accompanying *Satzpartikeln* (obligatory accent sandhi). Later, the unaccented definite article freed itself gradually from the obligatory presence of the *Satzpartikeln*, most probably because the article's character of *Satzteilpartikel* asserted itself more and more. (The article's unaccentedness lost its sentence-phonetic motivation.)

(Judging by the statistics sub (3) above, the relaxation of constraint (2.1) was quicker with definite articles in prepositional phrases than with other definite articles. This may be due to the fact that, in prepositional phrases, the definite article was protected by the preposition, i. e. by a clitical word, also after the relaxation of constraint (2.1), so that the relaxation was felt to be less of a departure from the original state of affairs with prepositional phrases than with other constituents containing the definite article.)

*Beowulf* seems to be the only preserved Old English text in which the ancient *Satzpartikel*-usage is so prominent. (Compare Barnouw 1902 for an analysis of the definite article in a num-

ber of other Old English poems.) In Old High German, the *Hildebrandslied*, although like *Beowulf* in the respect under discussion, is a much less convincing case, containing as it does no more than five instances of the definite article. At any rate, I believe that the definite article of the West Germanic languages other than Old English became clitical in the same way. On the other hand, I do not wish to preclude the possibility that a part of the definite articles, of English or of any other West Germanic language, became clitical in some alternative way, say because they were of a different origin than the bulk of the definite articles.

If I am right in assuming that the development was as described above, function words can become clitics in obligatory contact with unaccented or weakly accented words.

Other words than the definite article may also have permanently lost their word accent if and when the syntax brought them into contact with the *Satzpartikeln*, for instance the pronominal subjects (Orešnik 1984). These interesting cases have been left out of account here.

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- 1 My thanks are due to Miss Margaret G. Davis for the correction of my English. - The printing process used for the present number of the journal has made it necessary to disregard the usual rules for dividing words at the end of a line.

Povzetek

ODKOD NASLONSKOST ZAHODNOGERMANSKEGA DOLOČNEGA  
ČLENA - PRIMER Beowulf

70 % vseh določnih členov v staroangleški pesnitvi Beowulf stoji tik ob "stavčnih" breznaglasnicah, čeprav določni člen ne sodi mednje. Ta stava določnega člena je najstarejša sploh ugotovljiva stava določnega člena v Beowulfu in s tem v stari angleščini (kajti vse druge stave določnega člena v Beowulfu so razložljive kot spreprostitev najstarejše). Pojasnjuje, kako je staroangleški (in verjetno širše zahodnogermanski) določni člen postal naslonka: v obveznem stiku s "stavčnimi" breznaglasnicami.