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**Gothic modifiers in *-ata* and inflectional variation in the “strong” paradigm**

A peculiarity of the “strong” (indefinite) adjective paradigm in Gothic is morphological variation in the inflection of neuter nominative and accusative singular. In these paradigm slots adjectives and some other modifiers appear either as bare stems or as longer, pronominally inflected, forms in *-ata*: *jugg* ‘young’ vs. *juggata* (cf. *þata* ‘that’). Traditionally, the pronominally inflected forms in *-ata* have been assumed to be chiefly confined to attributive contexts, with the bare-stem forms being typical of predicative environments—cf. Wright (1954: 187), Krause (1968: 178), Rauch (2011: 74), etc. Thus, on the surface, the traditional account of the variation implies some form of syntactically-conditioned allomorphy, where the choice of one form over the other is governed by the syntactic context—attributive or predicative—in which the modifier occurs.

In an effort to test the traditional hypothesis on the principles that underlie the variation and examine the diachronic implications of the use of *-ata*, I examine the complete attestation of neuter nominative and accusative modifiers in Gothic. I show that the pronominal *-ata* forms are found in attributive, substantivised and predicative contexts across the modifier lexicon (including adjectives, the quantifier *alls,* possessive and demonstrative pronouns, past participles, etc.) and tend to prevail in attributive as well as substantivised use, with a few predicative attestations. As a result, *-ata* forms are not merely the morphological property of adjectives; nor are they merely attributive.

I show that the use of *-ata* forms is difficult to explain semantically. Instead, based on the evidence of inflectional variation in identical contexts I argue that the pronominal *-ata* forms are stylistically and contextually marked relics of older usage. In addition, I show that the more iconic *-ata* forms were used as a point of clarification in grammatically awkward environments. From a diachronic point view, the fact that the bulk of ­­*-ata* forms are more systematically attested in the quantifier *alls* ‘all’ (a word that has strong pronominal properties) and possessive pronouns is indicative of the strong inflection being more primary to pronouns. It is then possible to propose a scenario of reconstruction where the strong adjective inflection is an analogical development, having been passed on from demonstrative pronouns to prototypical adjectives through pronominal adjectives (such as possessive pronouns and the like).

I argue that the few attested predicative *-ata* forms are not an exception because they can be explained in terms of the statistics of case usage, and in particular the fact that *-ata* tends to dominate in the accusative. This eliminates the need to explain predicative *-ata* forms away, and the recognition of the fact that their use in Gothic extended to all syntactic contexts typical of adjectives (and other relevant modifiers) indicates that there is no syntactically-conditioned allomorphy in the neuter nominative and accusative singular and that the pronominal inflection in these slots is nothing more than a marked older form competing with the bare stem. Finally, I suggest that the patterning of *-ata* forms in relation to the noun, and in particular the tendency for these forms to be used in post-position to the head, is indicative of the adjective inflection having been pronominalised in the Germanic proto-language, when the typical pattern of word order was with modifiers being used in post-position to nouns.

References:

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