

What's in an *-n*? The rise of new inflections for perfect participles in Danish

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In the North Germanic languages, verb stems of the strong conjugations are characteristic in having an *-n* in the perfect participles (as opposed to a *-t* in the weak conjugations). In the indefinite singular, this *-n* also marks the common gender, cf. (1). In the neuter, the *-n* is replaced by a *-t*, cf. (2). Thus, the *-n* has dual function; it is a signal of strong conjugation and of the common gender. This is true of all the North Germanic languages, (1) and (2) are from Modern Danish.

(1)	en	overdreve- <i>n</i>	frygt
	an.C	exaggerated-C	fear
(2)	et	overdreve- <i>t</i>	forbrug
	an.N	exaggerated-N	consumption

In Danish, in the course of the 19th century, the *-n* is reanalyzed as a part of the stem in a large number of words, something that reveals itself by examples like (3) where the neuter *-t* is added to the *-n* rather than replacing it.

(3)	et	overdreven- <i>t</i>	forbrug
	an.N	exaggerated-N	consumption

As a part of this reanalysis, examples like (1) are subject to a new analysis of the kind in (4), evoking the gender marking known from prototypical adjectives, cf. (5ab).

(4)	en	overdreven-Ø	frygt
	an.C	exaggerated-C	fear
(5a)	en	stor-Ø	frygt
	a.C	big-C	fear
(5b)	et	stor- <i>t</i>	forbrug
	a.N	big-N	consumption

However, Danish never abandons the traditional way of declining perfect participles, and the two oppositions in table 1 are both in full use today.

Table 1	<i>-n/-t</i> as gender marker	<i>-n</i> as a part of the stem
common	<i>-n</i>	<i>-n-Ø</i>
neuter	<i>-t</i>	<i>-n-t</i>

Furthermore, by a number of words, even a third option emerges in the 19th century, i.e. *-t*-forms as indeclinable. Example (2) could also be a token of this option. Consequently, language users of Modern Danish navigate between three different systems when choosing a form.

In this paper, we show how these developments came about as a result of several other developments in Danish in the centuries prior to the reanalysis of the *-n*. These other developments involve morpho-syntactic matters (such as the development of a supine form) and matters of word formation (*-n* as part of the stem in other adjectives).

This paper contributes to the growing body of gender systems in the North Germanic languages (cf. e.g. Källström 1993; Ravnholt 2005; Hansen & Heltoft 2011: 452-464). Whereas the role of gender in so-called pancake sentences have generated some debate (e.g. Faarlund 1977; Enger 2004, 2013; Josefsson 2006; see also Schack 2018), less attention has been given to the changing forms and functions of gender in pre-modifying adjectives, and even less attention has been devoted to studies where the adjectival function is taken care of by a perfect participle (but cf. Jensen & Schack, to appear).

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