

Lesson 10

10.1 Reading. parsed for subjects and verbs. Subjects and subject phrases are single-underlined; verbs and verb phrases are double-underlined; horizontal bars separate clauses (independent, dependent, subordinate, relative).

449. Her Martianus and Ualentinus onfengon rice and rixadon .vii. winter. And on
þeora dagum gelaðode Wyrtgeorn Angelcin hider. And hi þa coman on þrim
ceolum hider to Brytene, on þam stede Heopwines fleet. Se cyning Wyrtgeorn
gef heom land on suðaneastan ðissum lande, | wiððan þe hi sceoldon feohton
wið þa Pyhtas. Heo þa fuhton wið Pyhtas and heofdon sige swa hwer swa heo
comon. Hy ða sendon to Angle, heton sendon mara fultum and heton heom
secgan Brytwalana nahtscipe and þes landes cysta. Hy ða sona sendon hider
mare weored þam oðrum to fultume. Da comon þa men of þrim megðum
Germanie: of Ald Seaxum, of Anglum, of Iotum. Of Iotum comon Cantwara
and Wihtwara, | þæt is seo megð | þe nu eardab on Wiht, | and þæt cyn on
West Sexum | þe man nu git hæt Iutna cynn. Of Eald Seaxum coman East
Seaxa and Suð Sexa and West Sexa. Of Angle comon | – se a syððan stod
westig betwix Iutum and Seaxum – | East Angla, Middel Angla, Mearca, and
ealla Norþhymbra. Heora heretogan wærон twegen gebroðra, Hengest and
Horsa, | þa wærон Wihtgilses suna. Wihtgils wæs Witting; Witta Wecting;
Wecta Wodning. Fram þan Wodne awoc eall ure cynecynn, and
Suðanhymbra eac.

10.5 Etymological and lexical notes

Apart from þeora in the 449 annal (and another instance in 1086), evidence suggests that the process began with the borrowed ON nom.pl. form þei > ME þey and was extended only later to the dat./acc.pl. forms becoming, in OE, dat.pl. þeim and gen.pl. þeira, PDE "them" and "their." This process of linguistic change appears to have been complete for the nom.pl. þei, "they" in the Southeast Midlands dialect of Middle English by the late 14th century – the time of Geoffrey Chaucer – while adoption of the oblique-case forms þeim, þeira, "them, their," wasn't completed until the post-Chaucerian period of late ME or early Modern English. In the opening lines of The Canterbury Tales, Chaucer uses the Scandinavian-derived þ - form þey in line 16 but the older indigenous forms hem and hir – descended directly from OE – elsewhere in the passage (the relevant plural pronouns are underscored in bold for emphasis):

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,

And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth 5
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halve cours yronne,
And smale foweles maken melodye,
that slepen al the nyght with open ye 10
(So priketh hem nature in hir corages);
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
And specially from every shires ende 15
Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,
The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
Than hem hath holpen whan that they were seke.

Line 18 above is particularly helpful for illustrating the adoption of the nom.pl. “they” from Scandinavian language, while the plural objective (accus. and dat.) case form hem, “them,” has not yet been replaced by the Scandinavian equivalent. As stated above, line 11 also contains two plural forms unchanged from earlier OE: hem, “them” (< OE him, heom) and hir, “their” (OE hīra, hēora, hȳra, etc.).

Analogous documentary evidence for ME borrowing of *þeir* appears in The Orrmulum, which however was written about a century later than the 1122 Peterborough Chronicle MS. The Peterborough Chronicle therefore can be said to offer the earliest recorded evidence for the shift from earlier OE forms to forms borrowed from ON. It is likely, however, that the 1122 evidence itself is rather late, as the process no doubt began much earlier, beginning sometime during the Danelaw period of the late 9th - late 11th centuries.

The 449 annal describing the beginning of the Anglo-Saxon migration was part of the original *Alfredian Chronicle, and the corresponding texts descending from it in the Parker Chronicle and the Worcester Chronicle manuscripts have the indigenous OE forms in *h-*, *hire/hira*. Laud manuscript 626, The Peterborough Chronicle, was written in a geographical area more receptive to Anglo-Scandinavian/English linguistic interchange, as evidenced by the fact that besides *þeora* the manuscript has a number of other Scandinavian loan-words, particularly in later continuations of the Chronicle post 1122 and in interpolated material originating with the last two Peterborough scribes which are interspersed throughout the MS.

Usage of “they” as a singular, non-gendered pronoun, still resisted by some who prescribe awkward forms such as “he or she,” “he/she,” or “s/he,” is not necessarily strictly a modernism, but was anticipated by the 1611 translators of

the Authorized Version of the Bible:

Num. 2:34, ". . . so they set forward, every one after their families"

Num. 15:12, ". . . so shall yee doe to euery one, according to their number"

II Kings 14:12: ". . . and they fled euery man to their tents"

Matt. 18:35 ". . . if yee from your hearts forgiue not euery one his brother their trespasses"

Phil. 2:3, ". . . let each esteeme other better then themselues."