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Register dependent variation.

Instructions in Notker's Psalterium and the Revelations of St. Birgitta

RQ: How does the situational parameter 'social role relationship' influence the choice of morpho-syntactic means to express instructions?

Being bilingual in their native language and Latin, Notker (ca. 950–1022), monasterial magister, and Birgitta (ca. 1303–1373), member of Sweden's political and cultural elite, provided texts that represent the emergence of two written Germanic varieties, Old High German and Old Swedish (Sonderegger 1987; Nordahl 2003). Notker's Psalterium and Birgitta's Revelations include instructive passages of direct speech. According to Neumann 2014 *instruction* is a situational parameter of a potential register, describing the goal of communication concerned with "the planning of future behaviour". As a social function, the variants of instruction are expected to correlate with the social role relationship between producer and recipient (Neumann 2014: 59, 63–64).

Thus far, we have observed for Notker a correlation between the use of subjunctive mode and a higher level of authority (Example 1), while Birgitta seems to use modal verbs when instructing persons with a lower level of authority (Example 2).

Du	*neferlâzest*	*mih*
you	NEG.leave.SUBJ.PRES.SG.2	me

'Don't leave me'

Example 1: Notker (26, 81,16). Believer to God.

han	*skal*		*mz*	*sinom*	*häst*	*gerna*	*til*	*kyrkio*	*ridha*
he	should IND.PRES.SG.3		with	his	horse	willingly	to	church	ride

'He should willingly ride with his horse to the church'

Example 2: Birgitta (II:13). God to knight.

In our talk, we focus on morphologically marked instructions, i.e. imperative mode, subjunctive mode and modal verbs. We expect to find systematic distributions influenced by the factor 'social role relationship'.

In order to answer the RQ, we adopt a corpus-based, quantitative approach. The Notker data are drawn from the Old German Reference Corpus 1.1 (Donhauser 2015) available on the search platform ANNIS (Krause & Zeldes 2016). For Birgitta we conduct a qualitative analysis on A65 and E8902, available at Fornsvenska Textbanken (Delsing 2002).

References

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