

Omission of finite verbs in Early New High German (1350-1650)

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This study delves into the multifaceted phenomenon of ellipsis from a historical point of view. In Early New High German (ENHG, 1350-1650) finite verbs can be omitted, although there is no identical antecedent:

(1) Da **ist** er eine Zeitlang still **gelegen/** vnnd ~~hat~~ **sich**
there is he a time.span silent lied and has REFL
mit seinem Kriegßvolck **Erquicket/**
with his war.people refreshed
„He lay still for a while and he has refreshed himself with his warriors.“ (Baumbank.UP, Johann Bange 1599, s488)

In (1) the finite verb is missing in the second conjunct. Concerning to Sapp (2011) the verb *sich erquickten* 'refresh oneself' selects the auxiliary *haben* 'have' to build the perfect tense in ENHG. In the first conjunction, however, it is an inflected form of *sein* 'be', which forms the finite verb.

Breitbarth (2005a,b) argues that the ellipsis in (1) marks a dependency relation (asymmetric coordination or co-subordination). Thomas (2019) analyses (1) as a purely stylistic device of ENHG. However, both focus on the so-called Afinite constructions, dependent clauses of ENHG characterised by the absence of a finite verb, in their studies. I assume, however, that (1) must be considered a coordination ellipsis.

My assumption is based on a corpus study of the Baumbank.UP (Demske 2019). The ENHG treebank contains prose compiled in a controlled manner according to space-time coordinates. The corpus (527,597 tokens) can thus be analysed both diachronically and diatopically.

The corpus study shows that ellipsis as in (1) increase in the 16th century. Moreover, they occur more frequently in upper German than in middle German texts. The ellipsis have these characteristics in common with the Afinite constructions. However, a closer look at (1) shows that they must be considered separately from the Afinite constructions. First, (1) is not restricted to dependent clauses; second, the ellipsis occurs only in second conjuncts; third, there is evidence of omitted objects, too. Since these are all characteristics of gapping (see e.g. Ross 1967), I conclude that (1) is a genuine coordination ellipsis.

The investigation of ellipsis in the ENHG is of great importance due to the closeness of the ENHG to orality. Additionally, not standardised languages such as Yiddish, as mentioned by Jacobs (2005), exhibit similar ellipsis patterns as shown in (1). To gain a deeper understanding of ellipsis phenomena, it is therefore necessary to look at language varieties that are close to the spoken language such as ENHG.

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