Influence of a word-class specific morpheme structure constraint on the development of the \{-∅/, -st/\} English adverbiaal alternation

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From *The Big Book of Beastly Mispronunciations*

maybe it’s “a-crossed”?
### Scope

The \{-∅, /-st/\} adverbial alternation:

5 prepositions, 2 adverbs, 1 conjunction

All with forms with and without /-st/

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>across(st)</td>
<td>again(st)</td>
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<tr>
<td>along(st)</td>
<td>amid(st)</td>
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<tr>
<td>among(st)</td>
<td>(un)beknown(st)</td>
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<tr>
<td>anigh(st)</td>
<td>while/whilst</td>
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Origin of /-s/

- Genitive /-s/ attaches to adverbials (adverbs, prepositions, etc.) derived from nouns
  - *on gegin* “on the opposite” => *again*
  - Marks other adverbials in OE, like *dæges ond nihtes* “by days and nights”  
  - Genitive /-s/ surfaces as modern possessive

Origin of /-t/

• Current analyses call /-t/ excrescent\textsuperscript{1:80}
  • Does not square with the phonological definition of excrescence: most common for consonant transitions\textsuperscript{1:67-68 2:52}
  • /-t/ may have originated as a dialectalism, then spread

Excrescence
“warmth”
sometimes sounds like warm\textit{p}th

If excrescence were correct…

amids English people
amidst the English

Morpheme structure constraints

- Rules that restrict the sound structures of morphemes (units of meaning)\(^1\):2050
  - No uninflected English word can end in multiple voiced obstruents\(^1\):2052
  - We know that \textit{loved} /\textipa{ʌv}\textipa{d}/ must be an inflected word
- MSCs can define sound structures for word classes
  - Dutch: verbs can only be monosyllabic, or second syllable of /\textipa{ə}/ followed by liquid\(^1\):2058

The anti-/OS/ constraint

Our proposal:
- /-/t/ in /-/st/ rose from a constraint preventing the {/-∅/, /-/st/} alternation and nouns from ending in a final obstruent and a /s/ with analogous voicing (/-/OS/)
- Motivation: dominance of plural /-/s/
  - /-/s/ becomes dominant noun plural c. 1300
  - Related to the {/-∅/, /-/st/} adverbial alternation because most alternation members are derived from nouns

Data was collected from a variety of corpora and analyzed using a custom Python script.

- /-s/ and /-∅/ forms codominant 1100-1500
- /-st/ and /-∅/ forms codominant 1500 on

/-∅/  /-s/  /-st/

approximate date of adoption of plural /-s/

- York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English (YCOE)
- Helsinki Corpus of English Texts (HCET)
- Parsed Corpus of Early English Correspondence (PCEEC)
- Corpus of Late Modern English Prose (CLMEP)
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- /-st/ and /-∅/ forms codominant 1500 on

Percent usage for forms over time for again(st)
Theoretical implications

• A traditional view is that sound change is not grammatically conditioned and applies to all eligible sounds in all words in a language
• When one inflectional pattern becomes dominant for a word class, that word class and related forms avoid the phonological structure of that pattern
• More evidence (challenging to collect):
  • Expect later emergence of /-t/ in dialects with later adoption of plural /-s/
• Further study:
  • /ð-/ (initial voiced th) limited in English to function words