

Abstract: Reanalysing German *noch*

I investigate the diachronic development of the German adverb *noch*. A number of recent contributions have looked at the synchronic picture of *noch*, its various uses and meanings (König 1977, Ippolito 2007, e.g. Beck 2016a, 2016b), as well as logical equivalents and counterparts (e.g. Löbner 1989). A corpus study covering 1282 tokens from Old High German (OHG), Middle High German (MHG), Early New High German (ENHG) and New High German (NHG) suggests that the comparative reading of *noch* (cf. (1), below) was available relatively early on and, more importantly, before the marginal reading of *noch* (cf. (2), below), in which the adverb can operate on a scale of degrees outside a comparative context.

- (1) Maria ist noch größer als Peter.
‘Mary is noch taller than Peter.’
→ *noch* operating on scale of degrees; comparison operator as argument
- (2) Kompaktwagen sind noch sicher. Kleinwagen sind (schon) unsicher.
‘Compacts are noch safe; subcompacts start to get dangerous.’
(taken and adapted from Ippolito (2007))
→ *noch* operating on scale of degrees (of safety); no comparison

An important note: I ignore what I call the conjunctive uses of *noch* as a possible relation with temporal/degree readings is not central to my current proposal. See (3) for an example:

- (3) Noh intprennent liht inti sezzent íz untar mutti noh untar betti [...] noh untar
Noch ignite light and set it under bushel, noch under bed, [...] noch under
faz, úzouh ubar kentilastab, thaz íz liuhte allen then in húse sint.
jar, but over candlestick, that it shines fully for those in house are.
*‘Neither light a candle and hide it under a bushel, nor under a bed, [...] nor in a barrel,
but on a candlestick so it may fully shine for those who are in the house.’*
(1.OHG1.TatianEvHarm.025.2)

Regarding the diachrony of *noch*, a general assumption has been that temporal readings of *noch* constitute the ‘original’ meaning of *noch* and that, due to a transition from a scale of times (*stage 1*) to a scale of degrees (*stage 2*), the comparative reading has become available (*stage 3*) (e.g. Hofstetter 2013). The data so far available, however, suggests that the comparative reading is the direct ‘offspring’ to the temporal reading and, as such, available even before ‘plain’ marginal readings operating on degrees (cf. (2), above). I propose a process of re-analysis to model this instance of meaning change.

Let’s start off with the standard temporal meaning, i.e. the continuative use of *noch_{temp}* from OHG1 (750–850) (cf. Beck 2016a for a discussion of ModG):

- (4) Mittiu thanne noh ferro uuas, gisah inan sin fater, inti miltida giruorit
During then noch distant was, saw him his father, and to.compassion moved
uuard inti ingegin louffenti fiel ubar sinan hals inti custa inan.
was and towards running fell over his neck and kissed him.
*‘When he was noch at a distance, his father saw him and was moved with compassion,
ran towards him and embraced and kissed him.’* (1.OHG1.TatianEvHarm.097.4)

In (4), *noh* (the OHG form of NHG *noch*) takes a time *t* as its argument and denotes that at time *t* the son is at a distance. Moreover, *noh* presupposes that the son is at a distance at a relevant earlier time (which is satisfied in the preceding context). In OHG1, *noch_{temp}* account for 91.5% of all tokens (note that percentages are normalized for cases of ambiguity; all unclear cases and *noch_{cjn}* are not counted). The second largest category (5.7%) is the additive reading of *noch* which I will not include in this analysis. There is one instance of a potentially comparative *noh* among the OHG1 data, which is, however, ambiguous with the conjunctive reading. Along the lines of Eckardt (2011), $[[noch]]_{temp}$, i.e. the meaning of *noch* with a temporal reading, corresponds to $[[noch]]_{1(old)}$ in this process of reanalysis. The next step for reanalysis to set in are precarious uses (cf. Eckardt 2011) which I view as e.g. contexts in which the older temporal reading co-occurs with a (covert) comparative (by ‘covert’ I mean the absence of a standard term of comparison, i.e. a *than*-clause). An example for this is (5):

- (5) Ladotun aaur tho then man, ther thes gi+siunes biquam, quadun, +sih thera dati
 Called but then the man, who of seeing became, said, himself to-the deed
 noh tho baz biknati.
 noch then/there better confess.
*‘But then they called the man who had regained eyesight and said that he should confess
 his actions noch better.’*
 (1.OHG2.OtfEbKell.202.105)

The *noh* in (5) is ambiguous: On the one hand, an argument for the temporal reading (not a continuative but a further-to reading (cf. Beck 2016a)) is the arguably temporal particle/adverb *tho*, structurally next to *noh*. A temporal reading is not disallowed by the context. On the other hand, the comparative adverb *baz* ‘better’ allows for a comparative reading, the antecedent for the comparison, i.e. the standard term of comparison is not in the immediate context. The presupposition triggered by the comparison has to be that a degree of confession has been done. Arguably, a comparative reading for (5) is salient. I consider (5) an instance of precarious use in the sense of Eckardt (2011), not necessarily stretching the limits of what is allowed in the grammar but certainly coming with a considerable pragmatic load or pragmatic options between plausible/implausible presuppositions (PSPs) (cf. Eckardt 2009). This invites reanalysis of *noh* as a comparative operator, i.e. a transition from times to degrees. Let’s turn to the next example and the first unambiguous case of *noch_{comp}* dating from OHG3:

- (6) Úbe árg uuêllen uuêlih íst. árg kemúgen. dáz íst nóh uuêlichera.
 When avil wants terrifying be, evil can. That is noch more-terrifying.
‘When evil wants to be terrifying, it can be so. That is noch more terrifying.’
 (1.OHG3.Notker.20.201)

The *noh* in (6) does not allow a temporal reading, nor is a temporal reading (along with a corresponding presupposition) supported by context. In OHG3 (950-1050), the reanalysis is complete, thus the denotation of *noch* in (6) is $[[noch]]_{new/comp}$ which takes a comparative operator (-*er*) as its argument. $[[Noch]]_{comp}$ ’s relative frequency steadily increases until it peaks in MHG3 (1250-1350) at 16.1% and then decreases to 10% in ENHG and 6.5% in NHG. Note, that the original meaning, i.e. $[[noch]]_{temp}$ continues to be available until ModG. Note also, that only considerably later in the history of German a marginal reading operating on degrees becomes available.

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