

Null subjects, preproprial articles, and the syntactic structure of Old Norwegian pronouns

Sverre Stausland Johnsen

Abstract

In Old Norwegian (ON), 1st and 2nd person null subjects (1/2 NS) are much rarer than 3rd person null subjects (3 NS). It has been suggested in recent work that 1/2 NS are ungrammatical and in fact do not exist in ON. According to this view, only 3rd person pronouns can be null subjects, because only they are not DPs (determiner phrases). For this latter claim to be true, ON cannot have preproprial articles, as this would indicate that 3rd person pronouns are DPs. This article presents ON data to demonstrate that the language has both 1/2 NS and preproprial articles. Since all ON personal pronouns appear to be DPs, there is little support for the purported difference in syntactic structure; thus, the observed asymmetry between 1/2 NS and 3 NS must have other, possibly extra-grammatical, causes.

Keywords: Null subjects, preproprial articles, pronouns, Old Norse, determiners, grammaticality, frequency, appositions.

1 Introduction

There has been much interest in recent years in the phenomenon of *null subjects* in the old Germanic languages. This includes work on Old English (van Gelderen 2013; Walkden 2013; Rusten 2015), Old High German (Axel 2007; Schlachter 2012), Gothic (Fertig 2000; Ferraresi 2005), Old Icelandic (Kinn et al. 2016), Old Swedish (Håkansson 2013), Old Danish (Heltoft 2012), and old Germanic languages in general (Walkden 2014). In a string of recent publications, Kari Kinn has investigated the distribution of null subjects in yet another old Germanic language: Old Norwegian (2016a,b,c). Based on the distribution of null subjects in a subset of the Old Norwegian text corpus, Kinn provides a theoretical account of how certain subjects are deleted from the derivation and thereby become null subjects.

In line with earlier work on Old Norwegian null subjects, Kinn observes that they are significantly more common in the 3rd person than in the 1st and 2nd person. The main assumption in Kinn's theory is that 1st and 2nd person pronouns are *determiners* while 3rd person pronouns are not. This difference in syntactic structure is suggested to be responsible for the observed asymmetry in null subjects, as it is proposed that there is a deletion process in the language that cannot target determiners. This process is then only able to delete 3rd person pronouns from the derivation, not 1st and 2nd person pronouns.

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The theory suggested by Kinn requires two aspects of Old Norwegian grammar to hold true. First, the grammar cannot allow 1st and 2nd person null subjects, since these pronouns are determiners. Second, 3rd person pronouns cannot function as *preproprial articles*, because if they did, 3rd person pronouns would also be determiners. While Kinn argues that both of these assumptions are supported by the Old Norwegian data, the aim of this article is to demonstrate with examples from Old Norwegian texts that neither assertion is warranted, and that the language in fact has both 1st and 2nd person null subjects and preproprial articles. As a result, there does not appear to be any difference in the syntactic structure of these pronouns, and the observed asymmetry must be due to other factors.

In the following section, it is explained in greater detail what null subjects are and how Kinn accounts for their presence in Old Norwegian. Section 3 discusses the theoretical framework of Kinn’s analysis, a framework I will also adopt in this paper. Section 4 treats the appearance of 1st and 2nd person null subjects in the Old Norwegian corpus, and it is argued that these instances cannot be dismissed as ungrammatical scribal errors. In section 5, it will be demonstrated that Old Norwegian has preproprial articles, and a closer discussion of the semantic and pragmatic properties of preproprial articles will be presented. Section 6 concludes the paper; it is argued that all pronouns in Old Norwegian are determiners, and it is suggested that the observed asymmetry in the distribution of null subjects in the text corpus could be due to discourse-related properties.

2 Kinn’s analysis

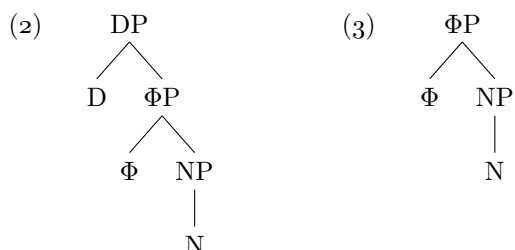
Old Norwegian exhibits clauses in which the referential subject is not expressed. An example is given in (1), where there is no expressed subject for the finite verb form *stefnir*. The missing subject is denoted here with an inserted item *pro*.¹

- (1) *Stefnir pro nú þing við folkit.*
 summons [she] now assembly with people.DEF
 ‘Now she summons the people to an assembly’ (Johnsen 1922: 5).

A “referential subject” is defined by Kinn as a subject that “denotes something” (2016a: 13), but it will not be relevant to this paper to discuss the referent or denotation of referential subjects any further. When the subject is not expressed, it is called a “null subject” (2016a: 13), and Kinn assumes all referential null subjects to be null pronouns (2016a: 67; 2016b: 111).

Kinn’s empirical finding for Old Norwegian is that “there is a strict grammatical restriction on 1st and 2nd person null subjects”, that there is “a grammatical rule that prevents them”, and that “null arguments are restricted to the 3rd person”. Kinn’s goal is to account for this finding (2016a: 32; 2016b: 113; 2016c: 295–296). To this end, she argues that in Old Norwegian, 3rd person pronouns have a different syntactic structure from 1st and 2nd person pronouns. The latter pronouns are said to be *determiners*, and so they form the determiner head D of a determiner phrase DP, illustrated in (2). 3rd person pronouns, on the other hand, “lack a D-feature”, and they “simply spell out φ -features”. As a result, they are called Φ Ps.² Their syntactic structure is illustrated in (3) (Kinn 2016a: 159–164; 2016b: 114–116; 2016c: 296–297).

1. I will follow Kinn’s convention of denoting the unexpressed subject with *pro* in the positions she has chosen (2016a: 31). Unlike Kinn (2016a: 30–31), however, I will for the ease of exposition normalize the spelling and add punctuation for Old, Middle, and Modern Norwegian alike, as the only thing of relevance here is the syntactic structure. Readers who are interested in the manuscript spellings and the phonetic transcriptions can follow the references given after the examples.
2. For the definition of φ -features, Kinn follows Déchaine & Wiltschko (2002: 410), who write that “ φ -features include number and gender, and in some cases person”.



The suggestion, then, is that there is a process in Old Norwegian that deletes Φ Ps from the derivation so that they are not phonetically realized, but that this deletion process cannot target DPs (2016a: 172; 2016b: 121; 2016c: 297–299). As a result, 3rd person pronouns can be null subjects in this language (they are deleted Φ Ps), whereas 1st and 2nd pronouns cannot be null subjects (they are DPs, which cannot be deleted). This difference explains, then, the so-called “strict grammatical restriction on 1st and 2nd person null subjects” in Old Norwegian. The technical details of how this deletion is assumed to take place are not relevant here, cf. Kinn 2016a: 170–177; 2016b: 119–121.

3 Grammaticality and the object of study

The central claim in Kinn’s analysis is that 1st and 2nd person null subjects are “ungrammatical” in Old Norwegian (see the previous and next section for more details). The notion of “grammaticality” is, however, a theoretical concept, and what constitutes grammaticality will depend on the framework employed. As Kinn’s theoretical framework is “current Chomskyan generative grammar, also known as Minimalism [or] the Minimalist Program” (2016a: 34–35), it will be useful to look more closely at the concept of grammaticality within Chomskyan grammar.

In the early instantiation of Chomskyan grammar, later dubbed the “Standard Theory”, the explicit goal is to develop a theory of grammar that is able to generate all and only the *grammatical* linguistic expressions of a language (Chomsky 1957: 13, 85; 1975: 95). Although there is no known criterion within this framework to conclusively determine when a linguistic expression is “grammatical” (Chomsky 1965: 11, 19), one typically relies on the native speaker’s intuition about what is a “well-formed” expression in his language (1957: 13; 1965: 18–21, 24; 1975: 101–102). The object of study within this framework, then, is the knowledge that the speaker draws on when applying his intuition (1965: 24–27; 1975: 95–96). This is the native speaker’s *internalized* knowledge about the linguistic structures of his language, an object referred to as *competence* (1965: 4, 8, 11).

An important point made in Chomsky’s works is that frequency is of no relevance to grammaticality (1957: 15–17; 1965: 195; 1975: 102, 145–146). Under this view, the probability of a linguistic expression has nothing to do with the speaker’s *competence*, but rather it has to do with *performance* (1965: 10–11). While *competence* is defined as “the speaker-hearer’s knowledge of his language”, *performance* refers to “the actual use of language in concrete situations” (1965: 4). Performance is affected by phenomena such as “memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, [...] errors (random or characteristic)[,] organization of memory[,], bounds on memory, [...] intonational and stylistic factors, [...] elements of discourse [...], and so on” (1965: 3, 10–11). Expressions that are less likely to be used by a speaker for reasons having to do with these factors are said to be less *acceptable*, a distinct notion from *grammatical* (1965: 11).³

3. While “acceptable” in this tradition thus means something different from “grammatical”, Kinn uses “acceptable” synonymously with “grammatical”. I will distinguish between the two terms as in Chomsky 1965.

Another important goal of the Standard Theory is to discover the fundamental principles of the innate predisposition for language, as this will serve as a guide for choosing among otherwise compatible theories of grammar for any given language (1957: 14, 50; 1965: 24–27; 1975: 77–80). With the advent of the “Principles and Parameters” model, this has become the main enterprise (Chomsky & Lasnik 1993: 514), and the notion that a theory of grammar should be able to generate or identify the grammatical expressions of a language is now called “misguided” (Chomsky 1986: 29–30). The object of study is nevertheless still the native speaker’s internalized knowledge about the linguistic structures of his language, now called *I-language* (1986: 21–24; 1993: 507), and the evidence for this knowledge continues to be that speaker’s intuition (1986: 36).

Within the current instantiation of Chomskyan grammar, the “Minimalist Program”, the focus has shifted almost entirely to determining the core properties of the innate predisposition (Chomsky 2000: 92), and grammaticality has explicitly ceased to play a role in the theory. A linguistic expression is either *convergent* or not (Chomsky 1995: 219–221; 2000: 95), but there is no requirement that a convergent expression make any sense. It can be “complete gibberish”, both phonetically and semantically (1995: 194, 219, 290; 2000: 141). *Convergence*, therefore, cannot be equated with *grammaticality* or *well-formedness*, which are notions now considered meaningless altogether (1995: 213).

Kinn has, as mentioned above, chosen the Minimalist Program as her theoretical framework, but given the current status of grammaticality in that program, it is not entirely clear what is meant by labeling various constructions as “(un)grammatical”, “(un)acceptable”, and “(not) licit” (Kinn 2016a passim), as these terms are not explained or discussed anywhere in her work. Nor is it made explicit if Kinn conceives of grammaticality as a matter of degree along a scale, as in the Standard Theory (Chomsky 1957: 42–43, 78; 1965: 148–153; 1975: 129–155), or if it is a binary phenomenon (either grammatical or ungrammatical) as has been the tradition in most of generative syntax (Sprouse 2007: 123).

Kinn states that “the object of study of this investigation is the I-language” (2016a: 95). The evidence for I-language is her own intuition when it comes to Modern Norwegian (2016a: 88), and for Old Norwegian the (fully justifiable) assumption is that the I-language of the scribes is reflected in the manuscripts (2016a: 96). The term I-language is defined as “the speaker’s knowledge of his or her native language(s), of what syntactic structures are allowed and not” (2016a: 36). Based on this definition together with the fact that she is proposing a categorical distinction between subjects that can be deleted and subjects that cannot be deleted (see section 2 above), I take it that Kinn is following the general tradition in generative syntax of viewing grammaticality as a binary notion (“what syntactic structures are allowed and not”). I will use the term *(un)grammatical* in this sense in the remainder of this paper. Following Kinn’s statements that the main contribution of her work on this topic is a syntactic analysis of a “strict grammatical restriction on 1st and 2nd person null subjects” in Old Norwegian and that “I aim to identify conditions on null subjects in the *grammatical system*” (2016a: 32, 37), I interpret her main goal to be that of the Standard Theory, i.e. to “separate the *grammatical* sequences [...] of [language] L from the *ungrammatical* sequences [...] of L and to study the structure of the grammatical sequences” (Chomsky 1957: 13).

Although the technical implementation of Kinn’s analysis is based on works within the Minimalist Program, it should be clear that the broader questions regarding methodology (i.e. grammaticality) and scope (i.e. the grammar of a specific language) are more in line with early Chomskyan grammar and the traditional practice of generative syntacticians. Some of the key theoretical concepts from this framework will be important in the following sections.

4 Null subjects

4.1 Testing a hypothesis

Kinn’s hypothesis of Φ P deletion (see section 2) leads to a clear prediction: 1st and 2nd person null subjects are ungrammatical in Old Norwegian. Kinn explicitly states that this prediction is met, cf. “my Old Norwegian data support the view that there is a strict grammatical restriction on 1st and 2nd person null subjects”, “1st and 2nd person null subjects are not actually a part of the I-language”, and “omission of 1st person subjects was not licit in Old Norwegian” (2016a: 32, 130, 265–266).

In order to meet scientific standards, any prediction must be falsifiable (Popper 1994: 15). To that end, Kinn gathers a corpus of Old Norwegian texts and tallies up the number of observed referential null subjects by their person features (2016a: 81–82, 128; 2016b: 109, 111). The assumption is that “null arguments found in my corpora are [...] in line with the I-language of the scribes, unless there are independent reasons to classify them as errors. A corpus may serve as a list [...] of phenomena that are possible in a given I-language” (2016a: 96). If 1st and 2nd person null subjects are ungrammatical in Old Norwegian (i.e. not possible in the I-language), then their number of occurrence in the corpus should be zero.

The number of occurrence is not zero, however, but five, corresponding to a proportion of about 1 % of the relevant sentences (2016a: 128–130; 2016b: 111–112). If the null subjects found in the corpus reflect what is possible in the I-language of the scribes, as is Kinn’s assumption, then the hypothesis about the ungrammaticality of 1st and 2nd person null subjects has been falsified, unless the anomalies are caused by errors or some other factor. In Kinn’s view, the data support her hypothesis that 1st and 2nd person null subjects are ungrammatical, and she offers two explanations aimed to account for the observed anomalies: (1) The attested 1st and 2nd person null subjects are scribal errors, (2) 1st and 2nd person null subjects have a very low frequency. These two explanations are discussed in the following sections.

4.2 Null subjects as errors

When treating the five cases of 1st and 2nd person null subjects in detail, Kinn claims that paleographic evidence suggests that 1st and 2nd person null subjects are “omission errors” and “unintended omissions” (2016a: 130; 2016b: 112), and in later discussions 1st and 2nd person null subjects are implied to be “accidents” (2016a: 179, 227). The hypothesis is that the scribes have omitted the pronouns by mistake, and that these omissions do not reflect anything linguistic (2016a: 130; 2016b: 112).

The key characteristic of an error is that there is no regularity to its distribution – it is random (Popper 1994: 152–158). If around 1 % of sentences with 1st and 2nd person pronominal subjects lack an overt pronoun due to an omission error not conditioned by language, as claimed by Kinn, then the same proportion of omission errors should be found for other word categories as well. If that is not the case, then there is some regularity to the distribution of omission errors with respect to *grammatical category*, meaning that there is something about the grammatical category of 1st and 2nd person pronouns that makes them liable to be deleted.⁴ And if the deletion is grammatically conditioned, then this indicates that 1st and 2nd person null subjects are grammatical. As an example, if Kinn’s omission hypothesis is true, we would expect to find that prepositions like *á*, *af*, *at*, *frá*, *í*, *með*, *til*, *við*, etc. are randomly missing from 1 % of the relevant sentences. While the reference literature mentions that 1st and 2nd person subject

4. Cf. Popper 1994: 158: “The methodological rule forbids the occurrence of systematic deviations; such as deviations in a particular direction, or the occurrence of segments which are atypical in a definite way” (translated from the German).

pronouns are sometimes missing (Nygaard 1905: 8–9), it makes no such observations about prepositions (cf. e.g. Nygaard 1905; Heusler 1932; Iversen 1972; Faarlund 2004).

In two of the five attested cases of 1st and 2nd person null subjects, Kinn notes that the line in the manuscript breaks where the pronoun would have been written. Kinn suggests that this constitutes paleographic evidence that the presence of a line break caused the scribe to omit the pronoun (2016a: 130; 2016b: 112). This suggestion is an *auxiliary hypothesis* to the main hypothesis about the ungrammaticality of 1st and 2nd person null subjects, and auxiliary hypotheses also need to make predictions and be falsifiable (Popper 1994: 51). One way to test this hypothesis would be to investigate whether words from other grammatical categories are also omitted to the same extent at line breaks, a question that is not explored further in Kinn’s work. In this case, however, the auxiliary hypothesis is falsified by the data Kinn presents. As the majority (three out of five) of the 1st and 2nd person null subjects in Kinn’s corpus are *not* at line breaks, there is no apparent link between the two observations.

4.3 Null subjects and frequency

The characterization of 1st and 2nd person null subjects that is made most often in Kinn’s work is that they are infrequently attested in the corpus. They are “barely attested”, “marginal”, “extremely rare”, “very scarce”, and “hardly present at all”. Their number is “strikingly low”, 1st and 2nd person pronouns are “practically never null”, and null subjects are “almost never first and second person” (2016a: 127, 130, 139, 142, 153, 155, 201, 222; 2016b: 112; 2016c: 295). The argument here is that the low frequency itself indicates ungrammaticality, cf. “The fact that 1st and 2nd person null subjects are barely attested in the Old Norwegian data set [...] may suggest that 1st and 2nd person null subjects are not actually a part of the I-language”, “I take the strikingly low frequencies [...] to indicate that there is a grammatical restriction on 1st and 2nd person null arguments in Old Norwegian”, and “if a [form is] almost never repeated in a large corpus, it may be regarded a sign of unacceptability” (2016a: 95, 130; 2016b: 112).

Five occurrences might seem like a low number, but it should be noted here that the corpus is of modest size. The total number of sentences with 1st and 2nd person subjects in this corpus is 650 (2016a: 128; 2016b: 111), and 5 out of 650 is 0.8 %. When we look at the almost identical sister dialect of Old Icelandic from the same time period (i.e. before 1350),⁵ we find 27 cases of 1st and 2nd person null subjects in the corpus investigated by Kinn et al. (2016: 66). Their proportion is nevertheless almost exactly the same as in the Old Norwegian corpus (0.7 % in Old Icelandic vs. 0.8 % in Old Norwegian), and so the higher absolute number in the Old Icelandic corpus (27 vs. 5) is only because this corpus is larger. But if a proportion of 0.8 % in the Old Norwegian corpus is so low that one can dismiss the instances in question as ungrammatical errors, then we should also dismiss the proportion of 0.7 % of such cases in the Old Icelandic corpus. Yet it is more difficult to accept that there are as many as 27 cases of erroneous omissions of 1st and 2nd person pronouns in the subset of Old Icelandic texts included in the corpus in Kinn et al. 2016.

The comparison with Old Icelandic suggests that the number of occurrences of 1st and 2nd person null subjects in Old Norwegian would be higher if the corpus was larger. By extension,

5. The two Old Norwegian dialects included in Kinn’s corpus are *Trøndsk Norwegian* and *West Norwegian* (Knudsen 1952: 19, 21; Holtmark 1956: 7; Kinn 2016a: 82–83). Heusler (1932: 7) points out that there is no sharp delineation between Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian, and that Old Icelandic shares many linguistic features with West Norwegian that are not found in Trøndsk Norwegian. Overall, the literature emphasizes that Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian are “very close” (Noreen 1923: 2; Heusler 1932: 7). With respect to the syntax, Nygaard (1905: 3–4) claims that there are no significant differences between the two varieties, and Kinn, too, suggests that the “default assumption” should be that the syntactic properties of Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian are the same, unless there is evidence to the contrary (2016a: 109). There are therefore good reasons to compare the Old Norwegian data with Old Icelandic.

we can predict that if we look beyond the corpus used by Kinn, we will find more examples of the same. There are many Old Norwegian texts outside of this corpus (cf. Seip 1955: 37–42, 66–68, 84–97, 225–240; Johannessen & Simensen 1975), some of which are contained in the collection of Old Norwegian charters from the 13th century (Hødnebo 1960). In one of the oldest of these charters, dated to 1243, we find another example of such a null subject, rendered in (4) below.⁶

- (4) *En elligar þá hǫfum pro heyrtr ok svá sétt bréf Magnús konungs*
 and else then have [we] heard and so seen letter Magnus king's
 ‘Moreover, we have heard and also seen king Magnus’ letter’ (DN I 51, Hødnebo 1960: 32).

In (4), the 1st person plural subject pronoun *vér* is not expressed, and there is furthermore no line break in this sentence that could otherwise explain this omission (cf. section 4.2). The ease with which this additional example was discovered suggests that a closer inspection of the many Old Norwegian texts outside of Kinn’s corpus would yield more instances of 1st and 2nd person null subjects, and at some point the question would need to be raised whether it is reasonable to suggest that they are all ungrammatical mistakes.

Nevertheless, Kinn correctly observes the existence of a clear asymmetry in the distribution of null subjects in Old Norwegian: null subjects are significantly more common in the 3rd person than in the 1st and 2nd person (2016a: 127–128; 2016b: 111–112; 2016c: 295). This asymmetry is, however, also observed in the other old North-West Germanic languages, cf. Rusten (2015: 70) for Old English, Axel (2007: 315) and Schlachter (2012: 183) for Old High German, Walkden (2014: 193) for Old Saxon, de Smet (1970) for Old Low Franconian, Kinn et al. (2016: 66) for Old Icelandic, and Håkansson (2013: 166) for Old Swedish. What all these languages have in common with Old Norwegian is that 1st and/or 2nd person null subjects are found in the manuscripts, and often with a low frequency. When a given syntactic phenomenon is shared among all languages within a language family, it seems more reasonable to me to assume that we are dealing with a real linguistic feature, rather than concluding that the phenomenon is due to scribal errors in some (or all) of the languages.

The low frequency of 1st and 2nd person null subjects in the Old Norwegian corpus is an interesting aspect of the language that calls for an explanation. According to Kinn, the explanation resides in the speaker’s grammatical system (see sections 2 and 3), and the low frequency of attestation indicates ungrammaticality (see above). But in Chomskyan generative grammar, which Kinn has adopted as her framework, there is no link between frequency and grammaticality, as discussed in section 3. Kinn herself notes that “information about the frequencies [...] is in and of itself of limited interest from a pure I-language perspective” (2016a: 96). Under the Chomskyan approach, frequency effects in a language corpus are caused by performance factors, not competence or grammaticality (see section 3).

Observations otherwise made of Old Norwegian and Old Icelandic texts support the view that one of these performance factors, *style*, plays a large role in determining the probability of null subjects. Nygaard (1905: 9–10) finds that 1st and 2nd person null subjects are “very frequent” in poetry, and Kinn et al. (2016: 39, 44) observe that null subjects have a much higher prevalence in texts dealing with science and law. It would be a very valuable enterprise to investigate in more detail what kind of performance factors affect the probability of 1st and 2nd person null subjects in Old Norwegian. Within the framework of Chomskyan generative grammar, the corpus data clearly indicate that, although grammatical, 1st and 2nd person null subjects are less *acceptable*

6. Old Norwegian allows null subjects that are coreferential with the subject of a preceding coordinated clause, a type of null subject that Kinn excludes from her study (2016a: 29). Although the sentence in (4) begins with the conjunction *en*, the sentence does not appear to be coordinated with the preceding clause, and there are no 1st person pronouns earlier in the charter that the null subject in (4) could corefer with anyway. The example in (4) is therefore not of a type that can be excluded from consideration on this basis.

than 3rd person null subjects, and one could therefore hypothesize that this difference perhaps has something to do with factors such as discourse, sentence processing, intonation, style, etc. Analyses along these lines are provided by Sigurðsson (1993) and Walkden (2014: 209–215), in which it is argued that discourse-related properties prevent 1st and 2nd person null subjects from being common, although they are allowed by the grammar. These specific proposals may or may not be correct (cf. the discussion in Kinn 2016a: 148–158), but at the very least we must acknowledge that an extra-grammatical solution is possible and could be worth pursuing further.

5 Preproprial articles

5.1 3rd person pronouns as determiners

In most dialects of Modern Norwegian, the 3rd person singular pronouns *han* ‘he’ and *ho* ‘she’ often precede proper names and kinship terms that function as proper names (Aasen 1864: 286–287; Heggstad 1931: 183; Beito 1986: 237; Faarlund et al. 1997: 247; Johannessen & Garbacz 2014). These pronouns are today often referred to as *preproprial articles*. This construction is exemplified in (5) and (6) below, with both examples taken from the dialect of my home region Inner Østfold. The pronouns are boldfaced for clarity.

- (5) *På tjuårsdagen heldt **han** Torbjørn og **ho** Eline ein fest for **ho** Sissel.*
 on twenty.year.day.DEF held he Torbjørn and she Eline a party for her Sissel
 ‘On her 20th anniversary, Torbjørn and Eline held a party for Sissel’ (Husmann 1943: 30).
- (6) ***Han** far er ikkje heime, og **ho** mor er daud.*
 he father is not home and she mother is dead
 ‘Father is not home, and Mother is dead’ (Målføresynopsisen § 43).

Following earlier scholars, Kinn argues that the use of 3rd person pronouns as preproprial articles demonstrates that these pronouns are determiners. As a result, 3rd person pronouns in Modern Norwegian are analyzed as forming the determiner head D of a determiner phrase DP (2016a: 253–256; 2016b: 123–124 with references).

5.2 Testing a hypothesis – reprise

As outlined in section 2, the central assumption in Kinn’s analysis of null subjects in Old Norwegian is that 3rd person pronouns in this language are not DPs. If the existence of 3rd person pronouns as preproprial articles means that these pronouns are DPs (section 5.1), then it follows from Kinn’s analysis that Old Norwegian cannot have preproprial articles. Kinn acknowledges this prediction by pointing out that the existence of preproprial articles is “not compatible” with her analysis of null subjects in Old Norwegian (2016a: 258). As a result, the hypothesis of the non-existence of preproprial articles in Old Norwegian is a falsifiable prediction that follows straightforwardly from Kinn’s analysis of null subjects.

Unlike the hypothesis of the non-existence of 1st and 2nd null subjects (section 4.1), the current hypothesis is not tested against the corpus data in Kinn’s work. No quantitative data are presented, and the notion that Old Norwegian has preproprial articles is only assumed in footnotes to be incorrect on the basis of the observation that the presence of 3rd person pronouns before proper names in Old Norwegian “does not seem to [...] have [any] semantic or pragmatic effect” (2016a: 165; 2016b: 124). It is left unmentioned, however, what such semantic or pragmatic effects might be, were they to exist, and how it was determined that these effects are not present.

Kinn nevertheless reports that the 3rd person singular pronoun *hann* “sometimes” or “sporadically co-occurs with proper names” in her Old Norwegian corpus (2016a: 165; 2016b: 124). The one example provided by Kinn is given in (7) below.

- (7) *Ok í því kemr hann Ásbjörn í stofuna.*
 and in that comes he Ásbjörn in room.DEF
 ‘And then Ásbjörn comes into the room’ (Johnsen 1922: 45).

The sentence in (7) is in fact immediately followed in the manuscript by yet another example of a 3rd person pronoun before a proper name, seen in (8) below. This fact will be important for the evaluation and analysis of example (7) I present later in section 5.4.

- (8) *Ok í því kemr hann Ásbjörn í stofuna. Snarask þegar at honum Þóri.*
 and in that comes he Ásbjörn in room.DEF turns [he] immediately at him Þóri.
 Þórir
 ‘And then Ásbjörn comes into the room. He turns immediately towards Þórir’.

More examples of personal pronouns cooccurring with proper names are not hard to come by in Old Norwegian texts outside of Kinn’s corpus. The excerpt in example (9) below is taken from the text *Heimlýsing ok helgifróði*, written by a Norwegian scribe around 1300 (Jónsson 1892–1896: xx–xxx; Helgason 1960: x–xi).

- (9) *Á því landi hinu sama var sá prófeti, er hét Daniel [...]. En hann Daniel var með konungi þeim, er hét Dari.*
 on that land the same was that prophet REL was.called Daniel [...] and he Daniel was with king that REL was.called Darius
 ‘In the same land was a prophet called Daniel [...]. And Daniel was with a king called Darius’ (*Hauksbók* 1892–1896: 161).

Examples (10) and (11) are taken from two Old Norwegian charters dated 1340.

- (10) *Halli á Hakavíkinni borgaði fyrir Loðini á Holtum uppá eitt hundrað sperna honum Katli Auðunarsyni*
 Halli on Hakavika bailed for Loðinn on Holtar upon one hundred rafters him Ketill Auðunarson
 ‘Halli from Hakavika guaranteed 100 rafters to Ketill Auðunarson on behalf of Loðinn from Holtar’ (DN V 137).
- (11) *Loðinn setti Halla tvau auraból í Holtum fyrir þá borgan, sem hann borgaði honum Katli Auðunarsyni.*
 Ketill Auðunarson
 ‘Loðinn mortgaged two *auraból* (a certain piece of farmland) in Holtar to Halli for the bail that Halli paid to Ketill Auðunarson’ (DN V 138).

If Kinn’s theory of null subjects is to be maintained, it is therefore necessary to conclude that the examples in (8–11) are not instances of preproprial articles. Kinn indeed presents three arguments to establish the claim that preproprial articles are unattested in Old Norwegian (2016a: 278; 2016b: 124): (1) Based on the empirical data, preproprial articles first started to appear in 15th century Middle Norwegian in the language of some speakers (2016a: 258); (2) Apparent

cases of preproprial articles before that time are in fact instances of *apposition* (2016a: 165–166, 252; 2016b: 124); (3) The attested cases of a 3rd person pronoun before proper names in Old Norwegian do not exhibit the semantic properties of preproprial articles (2016a: 165; 2016b: 124). These three arguments are addressed in the following sections.

5.3 Preproprial articles in Icelandic

As mentioned in section 4.3, Old Norwegian has a nearly identical sister dialect in Old Icelandic. When a linguistic feature is shared between Norwegian and Icelandic, scholars generally agree on two possible causes: (1) The common feature was inherited from early Old Norwegian before the Norwegian settlement of Iceland ended in the 10th century, or (2) The feature has spread from Norway due to language contact in the time period between the end of the settlement and the end of the 14th century, after which the contact between Iceland and Norway was severely diminished (Chapman 1962: 24, 39–41; Ottosson 2003: 112–113, 118–119; Sandøy 2003: 101–103).⁷ If preproprial articles really emerged in the Norwegian language first in the 15th century, then, as suggested by Kinn, we would not expect the same feature to be present in Icelandic.

Yet it is well established that Modern Icelandic has preproprial articles with the same morphological, syntactic, and semantic properties as Modern Norwegian does (Vigfusson 1874: 239; Einarsson 1949: 122–123; Sigurðsson 2006: 224–231; Thráinsson 2007: 91), as seen in example (12).

- (12) *Hún Anna sendi hann Jón til hennar Maríu.*
 she Anna sent him Jón to her María
 ‘Anna sent Jón to María’ (Sigurðsson 2006: 225).

The presence of preproprial articles in both Norwegian and Icelandic indicates that this feature can be no younger than the end of the 14th century, around the same time that Kinn sets as the end of the Old Norwegian period (2016a: 25; 2016b: 109). From the modern languages alone, then, it is probable that Old Norwegian exhibited preproprial articles.

Data from the old languages support this notion. As seen in examples (8–11) in the section above, everything suggests that Old Norwegian had preproprial articles at least as early as the first half of the 13th century, which is the date of the example in (8) (Holtmark 1956: 8). Preproprial articles are similarly not hard to come by in Old Icelandic texts. The excerpt in (13) below demonstrates two preproprial articles uttered by king Harald Fairhair when he meets Skalla-Grímr, contained in an Icelandic manuscript from around 1320–1350 (Einarsson 2001: xxv).

- (13) *Qlvir tók til máls: “Nú er Grímr hér kominn, sonr Kveld-Ulfs”. [...] Konungr*
 Qlvir took to speech now is Grímr here come son Kveld-Ulfr’s [...] king
lítaðist um. Hann sá, at maðr stóð at baki Qlvi [...]. “Er þetta hann
 looked around he saw that man stood at back Qlvir [...] is this he
Skalla-Grímr”, sagði konungr, “inn mikli maðr?” Grímr sagði, at hann kenndi rétt.
 Skalla-Grímr said king the great man Grímr said that he knew right
“Ek vil þá”, sagði konungr, “ef þú beiðist bóta fyrir Þórolf, [...] veita þér
 I will then said king if you request compensation for Þórolfr [...] give you

7. There is a third possibility, of course, which is that two neighboring languages have innovated the same feature independently of each other. This approach will not be entertained here for two reasons. First, according to the widely accepted scientific methodology of parsimony, it is preferable to posit one origin for one feature rather than two origins for one feature. Second, the use of personal pronouns as articles before proper names cannot be considered a universal tendency that is likely to emerge independently in two neighboring languages. I know of no languages outside of North Germanic that have this feature.

[...] *sómd, eigi minni en ek veitta honum Þórolfi, bróður þínum*”.

[...] honor not smaller than I gave him Þórolfr brother yours

‘Qlvir began speaking: “Now Grímr has arrived, the son of Kveld-Ulfr”. [...] The king looked around. He saw a man standing behind Qlvir [...]. “Is this Skalla-Grímr”, said the king, “the great man?” Grímr said that he was right. “Then I wish”, said the king, “if you request compensation for Þórolfr, [...] to honor you no less than I honored Þórolfr, your brother”’ (Einarsson 2001: 36).

Given the existence of preproprial articles already in Old Icelandic in the early 14th century, the emergence of preproprial articles in Norwegian must have occurred no later than the 13th century, well within the Old Norwegian period, and agreeing with the appearance of preproprial articles in the early 13th century Norwegian manuscript from which example (8) is taken.⁸ The data therefore do not support Kinn’s claim that preproprial articles first emerged in the 15th century in Norwegian.

5.4 Preproprial articles or appositions?

As mentioned in section 5.2, Kinn claims that all cases of a personal pronoun preceding a proper name in Old Norwegian (and by extension also Old Icelandic, which also has referential null subjects) are not instances of preproprial articles, but rather instances of *apposition*. Kinn does not specify in any detail what kind of structural relationship is assumed to hold between the elements of an apposition, and I will remain agnostic about that question here (see Ott 2016 for a recent discussion). For this discussion, I will assume that if the Old Norwegian collocation *hann Ásbjörn* in (7) is an apposition, as Kinn claims, then the first element, the pronoun *hann*, is the *anchor*, while the second element, the proper name *Ásbjörn*, is an *addition* to the anchor with a non-restrictive reading (cf. Burton-Roberts 1994: 186; Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 1351–1352). That the reading is non-restrictive means that the proper name *Ásbjörn* does not in any way modify what the pronoun *hann* is referring to. The proper name only serves to provide extra, and possibly disambiguating, information about the element it is added to.

Appositions in Modern Norwegian can be recognized from their phonetic properties. Generally speaking, there is an intonational break and a pause both before and after the added element in an apposition (Heggstad 1931: 182; Næs 1979: 254; Faarlund et al. 1997: 270, 913). As we have no access to the intonational properties of Old Norwegian sentences, any reasoning about the appositional status of collocations such as *hann Ásbjörn* must be based on their pragmatic and discourse-related properties. Kinn (2016a: 165–166; 2016b: 124) does not provide any such pragmatic or discourse-related arguments in favor of an appositional analysis. Instead, she assumes that the cases with a pronoun and a following proper name are appositions only because the pronoun, in her view, is not a preproprial article – a view based on the conclusion that the pronoun “does not seem to [...] have [any] semantic or pragmatic effect”. As mentioned in section 5.2, however, Kinn does not specify any further what those semantic or pragmatic effects should have been if the pronoun were a preproprial article, or how she has determined that the pronoun did not have those effects.

For the purposes of the following discussion, I will assume that any of the following three discourse-related properties are largely incompatible with an appositional analysis, or at the very least render such an analysis somewhat unlikely.

8. No attempt has been made here, though, to find the earliest examples of preproprial articles in either Old Norwegian or Old Icelandic. The examples given in (8–11) and (13) are merely the first instances I came across while looking for cases of preproprial articles. A proper empirical study of this phenomenon might therefore yield older examples than the ones given in this paper.

1. The pronoun in an apposition cannot depend on the added proper name for its reference. If it did, the addition would have a restricted reading (see above). In an apposition, then, the person the pronoun is referring to must be known from the context. If *hann Ásbjörn* is an apposition where the proper name is only an addition to the pronoun, then the pronoun should be able to stand on its own with its referent still retrievable from the context, although possibly with some ambiguity (cf. Burton-Roberts 1994: 185).
2. The added proper name in an apposition cannot itself be in apposition with another added element. If the proper name in *hann Ásbjörn* is an addition, it cannot itself have an addition after it, as *faðir þín*, i.e. *hann, Ásbjörn, faðir þín* ‘he, Ásbjörn, your father’ (constructed example). In short, an apposition embedded within another apposition is unlikely to occur, primarily because a scribe would hardly deliberately construct a structure that is both rare in speech and more difficult for readers to process.
3. An apposition with a pronoun and a proper name is unlikely to be in more or less immediate succession with another apposition of the same kind, as it is both rare in natural speech and would sound disruptive in an otherwise normally flowing prose. Cf. how an English sentence of this kind would sound: “Then he, John, walked in and saw him, Bill, standing next to her, Mary”.

With these criteria in place, we can evaluate the probability that the Old Norwegian and Old Icelandic examples in (8–11) and (13) are appositions. Example (8) is repeated in (14) below.

- (14) *Ok í því kemr hann Ásbjörn í stofuna. Snarask þegar at honum*
 and in that comes he Ásbjörn in room.DEF turns [he] immediately at him
Þóri.
 Þórir
 ‘And then Ásbjörn comes into the room. He turns immediately towards Þórir’.

If these were appositions, as Kinn claims (2014: 189–191; 2016a: 165–166), the English translation would be “Then he, Ásbjörn, comes into the room. [He] turns immediately towards him, Þórir”, with one apposition more or less immediately following another. This sounds unnatural because it violates condition 3 above. The [pronoun + proper name] constructions here are therefore unlikely to be appositions. This specific example is a good demonstration of why it is often important to provide the relevant context for the analysis of a linguistic sentence. As mentioned in section 5.2, Kinn (2016a: 165) only provides the first sentence in (14) as an example of a personal pronoun followed by a proper name. The first sentence in isolation appears to be a possible case of an apposition, but when the following sentence from the manuscript accompanies it, the possibility that we are seeing two appositions in sequence becomes relatively small.

Example (10) is repeated in (15) below. The sentence in (11) is an equivalent example that will not be repeated here.

- (15) *Halli á Hakavíkinni borgaði fyrir Loðini á Holtum uppá eitt hundrað sperna honum*
 Halli on Hakavika bailed for Loðinn on Holtar upon one hundred rafters him
Katli Auðunarsyni
 Ketill Auðunarson
 ‘Halli from Hakavika guaranteed 100 rafters to Ketill Auðunarson on behalf of Loðinn from Holtar’.

If *honum Katli Auðunarsyni* is an apposition, then the pronoun should be able to stand on its own. But the person Ketill Auðunarson has not been mentioned earlier in this charter, nor has the fact that anyone is going to receive rafters. The sentence in (15) is in fact the first

sentence in this charter that mentions any of these people and the agreement they have reached. If the construction in *honum Katli Auðunarsyni* did not include the proper name, it would be impossible to identify the referent of the pronoun. This example can therefore not be an instance of an apposition, as it violates condition 1 from above. The same applies to the sentence in (11).

The most relevant portions of the Old Icelandic excerpt in (13) are given in (16) below.

- (16) “*Er þetta hann Skalla-Grímr*”, *sagði konungr*, “*inn mikli maðr?*” [...] *eigi minni en ek veitta honum Þórolfi, bróður þínum*”.
 is this he Skalla-Grímr said king the great man [...] not smaller than
 I gave him Þórolfr brother yours
 “Is this Skalla-Grímr”, said the king, “the great man?” “[...] no less than I gave Þórolfr, your brother”.

Both of the [pronoun + proper name] collocations in (16) place the proper name itself in apposition with a following noun phrase: *hann Skalla-Grímr* [...], *inn mikli maðr* ‘Skalla-Grímr, the great man’, and *honum Þórolfi, bróður þínum* ‘Þórolfr, your brother’. If the proper names are additions to the pronouns, then both of these collocations violate condition 2 above, since in both cases an apposition is embedded within another apposition. The English translations would in that case read “Is this him, Skalla-Grímr, the great man?” and “no less than I gave him, Þórolfr, your brother”, both of which sound decidedly less natural and more clunky than “Is this Skalla-Grímr, the great man?” and “no less than I gave Þórolfr, your brother” – the reading under a preproprial article analysis.

In conclusion, this section has shown that when explicit criteria are laid down to identify appositional material, relevant example sentences from Old Norwegian and Old Icelandic fail to meet these criteria. It is therefore all the more likely that these examples are instances of preproprial articles.

5.5 The semantics of preproprial articles

As pointed out in section 5.2, the existence of preproprial articles in Old Norwegian is incompatible with Kinn’s analysis of null subjects in the language. Such examples of personal pronouns before proper names are nevertheless attested. Kinn concludes that such examples are appositions rather than preproprial articles, but an actual analysis of the relevant examples in section 5.4 above demonstrates that the apposition account is unlikely to be correct. Kinn’s conclusion that these collocations do not contain preproprial articles is drawn on the following basis: The underlying hypothesis is “that presence or absence of the preproprial article is associated with some semantic, pragmatic or sociolinguistic effect”, and she argues that it “does not seem to be the case” that these effects are present in Old Norwegian because she has “not been able to spot any such patterns” (2016a: 165, 254; 2016b: 124). It is not mentioned, however, what semantic and pragmatic effects she hypothesizes the preproprial article to have, and so it becomes unclear on what basis the conclusion is drawn that these effects are not found in Old Norwegian. In this section, I will make explicit the expected semantic and pragmatic properties of preproprial articles, and will demonstrate that the Old Norwegian and Old Icelandic data from section 5.2 are quite compatible with a preproprial article analysis.

One recurring argument against the existence of preproprial articles in Old Norwegian is that proper names are not consistently preceded by personal pronouns in Old Norwegian texts, unlike some Modern Norwegian dialects where preproprial articles are obligatory “in the contexts where they occur” (Kinn 2016a: 165, 254, 257–258; 2016b: 123–124). Data from the modern Nordic languages demonstrate, however, that obligatoriness is not a consistent characteristic property of preproprial articles in synchronic grammars. They are optional in my Norwegian

dialect (cf. also the varied use of preproprial articles in Husmann 1943), they are optional in Icelandic (Delsing 2003: 21; Sigurðsson 2006: 224), they are inconsistently used by speakers of a Norwegian dialect investigated by Håberg (2010: 62–68), and they are reported to be optional in the Outer Nordreisa dialect (Delsing 2003: 21) as well as in the Stange and Hamar dialects (Johannessen 2006: 99, 103). There is therefore no reason to assume they should be obligatory in Old Norwegian either.

The preproprial article is “a marker of familiarity or givenness”, and speakers “use it to signal that both they and the addressee are familiar with the person in question” (Sigurðsson 2006: 225–226). Dialects differ, however, in how familiar a speaker has to be with the person in question for a preproprial article to be appropriate. In some Norwegian dialects, the preproprial article can only be used with first names (cf. Larsen 1907: 112; 1926: 550–551), indicating that the person needs to be known by the speaker personally, while in other Norwegian dialects the only condition is that the person is “known at all”, which then includes people from the news or from history that the speaker has never met (cf. Iversen 1918: 26; Venås 1977: 221–222; Haugen 1982: 126; Juel 1991: 57). As a very loose characteristic, then, one can say that a preproprial article signals that the person is, on some level, known to the speaker or the listener, either personally or from some other context. Another way of phrasing it would be to say that the person’s identity is given from personal experience or contextual knowledge. Knowing the semantic and pragmatic properties of the preproprial article, we can have a closer look at the examples from section 5.2.

Example (8) from the Legendary Saga of St. Olaf is repeated in (17) below.

- (17) *Ok í því kemr hann Ásbjörn í stofuna. Snarask þegar at honum*
 and in that comes he Ásbjörn in room.DEF turns [he] immediately at him
Þóri.
 Þórir

‘And then Ásbjörn comes into the room. He turns immediately towards Þórir’.

These two sentences appear in the climax of a story (in the very next sentence, Ásbjörn chops Þórir’s head off). The story begins by introducing Ásbjörn, his background, and how he traveled with his men to buy grain. Then Þórir is introduced into the story, and it is told how he confiscated Ásbjörn’s grain from his ship. When the two men later meet again, both men are well known to the reader from context, and their identities are given information. Use of preproprial articles with these two names in this context is therefore quite appropriate and natural.

Example (9) from *Heimlýsing ok helgifróði* is repeated in (18).

- (18) *Á því landi hinu sama var sá prófeti, er hét Daniel [...]. En hann Daniel*
 on that land the same was that prophet REL was.called Daniel [...] and he Daniel
var með konungi þeim, er hét Dari.
 was with king that REL was.called Darius
 ‘In the same land was a prophet called Daniel [...]. And Daniel was with a king called Darius’.

The first sentence in (18) sets the beginning of a chapter that introduces a prophet called Daniel. The following sentences tell about Daniel’s virtues as a man of God. By this time, the identity of Daniel is given information, and he is the only person mentioned so far in this chapter. It is therefore quite appropriate and natural to use a preproprial article when his name is mentioned again, as in the second sentence of (18).

The excerpt from Egil’s Saga is another example of this type, seen in (19).

charter. If taken in isolation, then, it might appear random that Ketill Auðunarson’s name is preceded by a preproprial article. But the exact same scenario is found in example (11) (which will not be repeated here), which is taken from another charter issued on the same day and written by the same scribe (Vågslid 1989: 227). In this charter we also find that Halli and Loðinn are mentioned without a preproprial article while Ketill is mentioned with one. This consistent practice indicates that the presence of the preproprial article is meaningful, and not random. A closer look at the people in these charters clarifies the function of the preproprial article in this context.

One of the two issuers of these charters is named as Finnkell from Rauden in Tønsberg; he and the other issuer witnessed and signed off on the agreements together at Glødesgard in Tønsberg. The charters themselves were also written in Tønsberg (Vågslid 1989: 227). The two men mentioned without a preproprial article in these charters, Halli and Loðinn, are not from Tønsberg, but from Hakavika and Holtar, respectively (both places in Fiskum about 50–70 km northwest of Tønsberg). Ketill Auðunarson, on the other hand, the only person mentioned with a preproprial article, was a well-known trader in Tønsberg at the time (Gjessing 1913: 121; Pedersen 1961: 90). We see then, that the person mentioned with a preproprial article is a well-known citizen from the same town as the scribe and issuers of the charters, whereas the other men appear to have come to town for the purpose of entering these agreements. It is reasonable to assume, then, that Ketill Auðunarson was personally acquainted with the issuers and scribe of these charters, and that the preproprial article signals that these people are familiar with him, and that his identity is known to them from personal experience.⁹

5.6 Cooccurrence of null subjects and preproprial articles

As mentioned in earlier sections (see, e.g., section 5.2), Kinn acknowledges that the existence of preproprial articles in Old Norwegian would be incompatible with her analysis of null subjects. This does not, in her view, constitute a problem, as she claims that preproprial articles are absent in the Old Norwegian language, and that apparent cases of preproprial articles before proper names are actually appositions. In the sections above, I have argued against this assessment and for a preproprial article analysis. In this section, I turn to the case of Middle Norwegian. Here, Kinn agrees that preproprial articles do exist, but she claims to have found no texts in which preproprial articles and null subjects cooccur (2016a: 258, 273). In her view, then, the incompatibility of preproprial articles and null subjects is supported by both the Old and Middle Norwegian data. Below I will demonstrate that we do find preproprial articles and null subjects cooccurring in both languages.

The examples of null subjects in (21–23) below are taken from the same chapters as examples (8–9) and (13) of preproprial articles. Furthermore, in all cases, the sentence with a null subject

9. In Modern Norwegian, the 3rd person singular pronouns *han* ‘he’ and *ho* ‘she’ can also be used before proper names in a different context than the one addressed in this section. The pronouns in this usage differ phonologically from the preproprial articles in that they bear some stress and have non-reduced forms, and differ morphologically in not being inflected for case (Johannessen 2008: 169–170). From a semantic and pragmatic perspective, they function nearly as the opposite of preproprial articles. According to Johannessen (2008: 163–166), they signal that either the speaker or the listener does not know the person in question, and according to Lie (2008: 90–91; 2010), they are used to introduce a previously unmentioned person into the discourse. These pronouns, which Johannessen calls “psychologically distal demonstratives”, are in other words used to mark unfamiliarity or non-givenness – the exact opposite of what preproprial articles are used for. In this section, I have shown that pronouns that precede proper names in examples (17–20) signal either familiarity or givenness. For this reason, I conclude that these pronouns are more likely to be preproprial articles rather than “psychologically distal demonstratives”. Also note that “distal” demonstratives function as determiners in a DP (Johannessen 2008). The status of these pronouns as preproprial articles versus “distal demonstratives” would therefore not affect the overall argument made in this paper, which is that 3rd person pronouns function as determiners in Old Norwegian.

appears, in the text editions of these works, no further than a page away from the sentence(s) containing preproprial articles. In example (21) below, the preproprial article and the null subject even cooccur in the same sentence. Examples (21) and (22) are from Old Norwegian, whereas (23) is from Old Icelandic, which also has null subjects. As before, the null subject is marked in the examples with *pro*.¹⁰

- (21) *Ok í því kemr hann Ásbjörn í stofuna. Snarask pro þegar at honum Þóri.*
 and in that comes he Ásbjörn in room.DEF turns [he] immediately at him
 Þórir
 ‘And then Ásbjörn comes into the room. He turns immediately towards Þórir’ (Johnsen 1922: 45).
- (22) *Ef þér segið mér þat satt, at hann etr þat alt, þá skal pro drepa Daniel.*
 if you say me that true that he eats that all then shall [one] kill Daniel
 ‘If you tell me that it is true that he eats everything, then Daniel shall be killed’ (*Hauksbók* 1892–1896: 162).
- (23) *Síðan fóru þeir ok kómu til vatnsins, ok fengu þar engi skip þau, er fór væri.*
 then went they and came to water.DEF and got there no ships that REL able were
Fóru pro aptr síðan ok soggðu konungi sína ferð
 went [they] back then and said king their travel
 ‘Then they went and came down to the water, but they could not find any ships there that were useable. They went back and told the king what had happened’ (Einarsson 2001: 37).

Kinn (2016a: 257–258; 2016b: 124) discusses an early Middle Norwegian charter cited by Dahl (2015: 98–99, 252), which evidently demonstrates that preproprial articles emerged in the language of “some speakers” as early as 1430. The charter displays six occurrences of personal pronouns followed by proper names, but Kinn is not convinced that these are preproprial articles; regardless, she claims that preproprial articles at any rate “are rare at this stage”. More importantly, as preproprial articles and null subjects cannot cooccur on Kinn’s analysis, she points out that, “As predicted by my account, there are no null subjects in the charter cited by Dahl (2015)”. At the same time, she reports to have found charters with both null subjects and personal pronouns followed by proper names, but these examples are rejected because “in none of the texts does a preproprial article analysis seem convincing”, although no further details are provided about these examples or where they can be found (2016a: 258). It is later claimed that “I have seen no instances of preproprial articles co-occurring with null subjects” in Middle Norwegian (2016a: 273).

Below, I present a Middle Norwegian charter that is even older than the charter cited by Kinn (2016a) and Dahl (2015) (1422 vs. 1430) and that has more occurrences of preproprial articles (ten vs. six). In addition to demonstrating that these really are preproprial articles, I will show that the charter also has a referential null subject.¹¹

10. It could be argued here that the second sentence in (21) is not in fact a separate sentence, but rather a clause coordinated with the previous sentence. Here I have followed Kinn’s own criteria, by which (21) must be taken as two separate independent sentences (2016a: 91). The example in (21) is also annotated as two separate sentences with a referential null subject in Kinn’s underlying corpus, cf. <http://foni.uio.no:3000/sentences/220004>. The sentence in (22) has what Kinn calls a “generic null subject”. Kinn (2016a: 111–112) includes generic null subjects in her definition of referential null subjects, and so I will follow that approach here.

11. The charter is rendered in full here to showcase the wide usage of preproprial articles. The content of the charter as such is not particularly relevant here, so it will for reasons of space not be translated. Excerpts from the charter that are discussed in more detail are glossed and translated in examples (24–26).

- (25) Item *seldu þeir ok, hann Ásbjörn ok hann Sǫlvarr, hérna Háland fyrrnefnda*
thus sold they and he Ásbjörn and he Sǫlvarr this Háland aforementioned
 ‘And thus they, Ásbjörn and Sǫlvarr, sold the aforementioned Háland’.
- (26) Item *kendust ok þeir, hann Ásbjörn ok hann Sǫlvarr, at þeir höfðu [...]*
thus acknowledged and they he Ásbjörn and he Sǫlvarr that they had [...]
 ‘And thus they, Ásbjörn and Sǫlvarr, acknowledged that they had [...]’.

In both cases, the sequence *hann Ásbjörn ok hann Sǫlvarr* is an apposition to the subject pronoun *þeir*; thus, for that reason, the personal names cannot be appositions to the pronoun *hann*. If they were, the pronoun *hann* would function as the main element in the apposition to the pronoun *þeir*. Recall from section 5.4 that the pronoun in an actual apposition *hann Ásbjörn* should be able to stand on its own (condition 1). So if the sequences of personal pronouns plus proper names in (25–26) are appositions, we should be able to leave out the names and read *þeir, hann ok hann* ‘they, he and he’. Such a construction makes very little sense, of course, since an apposition like *hann ok hann* ‘he and he’ does not add any meaningful information to the already existing pronoun *þeir* ‘they’. This is especially true for this language, in which the masculine form *þeir* unambiguously reveals that all the members of the set it refers to are male. The only meaningful way of interpreting the collocations in (25–26) would be to read *þeir, hann Ásbjörn ok hann Sǫlvarr* ‘they, Ásbjörn and Sǫlvarr’, in which the meaningful and disambiguating information added to the pronoun *þeir* is the names of the people that *þeir* refers to. There is, therefore, no doubt that we are dealing with preproprial articles in this charter from 1422.

6 Conclusion

In the Old Norwegian text corpus, there is an apparent asymmetry in the distribution of referential null subjects. While they are relatively common in the 3rd person, they are markedly rarer in the 1st and 2nd person. In recent work, Kari Kinn (2016a,b,c) claims that this difference is the result of a grammatical restriction in the language of the scribes, according to which 3rd person null subjects are grammatical, whereas 1st and 2nd person null subjects are ungrammatical.

Kinn proposes the following technical implementation to account for this difference: 1st and 2nd person pronouns are *determiner phrases*, or DPs, while 3rd person pronouns are *φ-feature phrases*, or ΦPs. A syntactic process in the Old Norwegian grammar deletes ΦPs, thereby creating 3rd person null subjects, but the same process cannot delete DPs, and this ensures that 1st and 2nd person pronouns stay intact.

For this theoretical analysis to be possible, two conditions must hold true for Old Norwegian: (1) 1st and 2nd person null subjects cannot exist, and (2) 3rd person pronouns cannot be DPs. In this article, I have demonstrated that neither of these two conditions is supported by the empirical data. With respect to the first condition, there is no question that we do find 1st and 2nd person null subjects in the Old Norwegian texts. Kinn’s suggestion to dismiss all such cases as omission errors is not supported by the data, as the instances are neither randomly distributed (as errors should be) nor limited to the locations in the manuscripts where Kinn hypothesizes they should occur. When it comes to the second condition, data from Modern Norwegian suggest that 3rd person pronouns must be interpreted as DPs if the language uses those pronouns as preproprial articles. If 3rd person pronouns in Old Norwegian are not DPs, then Old Norwegian cannot have preproprial articles. Although Kinn claims that this prediction holds, empirical data from Old Norwegian texts demonstrate quite clearly that preproprial articles do exist in the language. As a result, 3rd person pronouns must be DPs in Old Norwegian.

The conclusion that the Old Norwegian 3rd person pronouns are DPs should not be a surprise, given the history of these pronouns. It is generally agreed that they originated as demonstratives in early Proto-Norse, as the initial consonant *h-* in *hann* ‘he’ and *hon* ‘she’ stems from a demonstrative element seen in many related Indo-European languages (cf. e.g. de Vries 1962: 209; Seebold 1984: 61, 65). Without evidence to the contrary, we should assume that words that originated as determiners in Proto-Norse, and that function as determiners in Modern Norwegian, also were determiners at the intermediate stage of Old Norwegian.

In conclusion, there does not seem to be any empirical evidence to support the idea that there is a difference in the syntactic structure between 1st and 2nd person pronouns, on the one hand, and 3rd person pronouns, on the other hand, in Old Norwegian. They all appear to have the ability to function as determiners, thus indicating that they are all determiner phrases, or DPs. Their syntactic structure can therefore not be responsible for the observed asymmetry in how often they appear as null subjects. It seems more likely that this difference has something to do with *performance* issues, and more specifically with discourse-related properties.

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Sverre Stausland Johnsen
 Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies
 University of Oslo
 PO Box 1102 Blindern
 NO-0317 Oslo
 stausland.johnsen@iln.uio.no