

The Prosodic representation of *Verschmelzungsformen* in Middle High German

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Prosodic Hierarchy: Syllable σ > Foot F > Prosodic Word ω > Phonological Phrase φ > Intonational Phrase I > Utterance U

Introduction & Background

Verschmelzungsformen (VFs, “fused forms”) are [FNC=FNC] sequences comprising a preposition and an encliticised definite article, e.g. *zum* < *zu dem* (“to the”). Although characteristic of Modern and Middle High German (NHG and MHG) and repeatedly discussed in the literature, it remains unclear how VFs are to be integrated into the prosodic hierarchy. This research investigates the following questions:

- (i) **What is the default direction of cliticisation in MHG?** (ii) **What is the prosodic representation of VFs in MHG?**

The trochaic nature of phonological phrasing in Germanic is well attested (cf. Lahiri & Plank 2010). Nevertheless, many accounts assume an isomorphic relationship between syntactic and phonological phrasing, with widespread acceptance of [FNC=LEX] procliticisation as the norm (e.g. Selkirk 1995). Examples of the various positions can be found in:

- Lahiri & Plank (2010) and Lahiri & Sytsema (2018) suggest that phonological phrasing in Germanic is almost exclusively left-leaning: $[[LEX]_{\omega}=FNC]_{\omega}$.
- Wiese (1996) allows for recursiveness, but takes procliticisation for granted and neglects VFs: $[FNC=[LEX]_{\omega}]_{\omega}$.
- Hall (1999) and Kabak & Schiering (2006) reject recursivity, assuming that VFs procliticise, dominated directly by the φ : $[[FNC=FNC]_{\varphi}=[LEX]_{\omega}]_{\varphi}$.

Data

MHG orthography is unreliable and the best prosodic evidence comes from poetry (cf. Lahiri & Systema 2018). Drawing on *St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. 857*, a 13th-century *Parzival* MS, this research analyses the orthographic representation and metrical footing of VFs formed from two MHG prepositions, *zuo*, *ze* (/tsuə, tsə/ “to”) and *in* (/in/ “in”).

In NHG, VFs are highly grammaticalised, but in MHG, such structures were far more productive and forms absent from the modern standard, such as *zen* (< *zuo den*) or *ûfem* (< *ûf dem*), were common.

| | — U | U — | — | U |
|------------------------|-----|-----|---|----|
| $z\check{v} + dem$ | 15 | 10 | 1 | 77 |
| $z\check{v} + der$ | 16 | 0 | 1 | 92 |
| $z\check{v} + den$ | 12 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| <i>in</i> + <i>daz</i> | 15 | 0 | 5 | 15 |
| <i>in</i> + <i>dem</i> | 35 | 0 | 5 | 19 |

Discussion

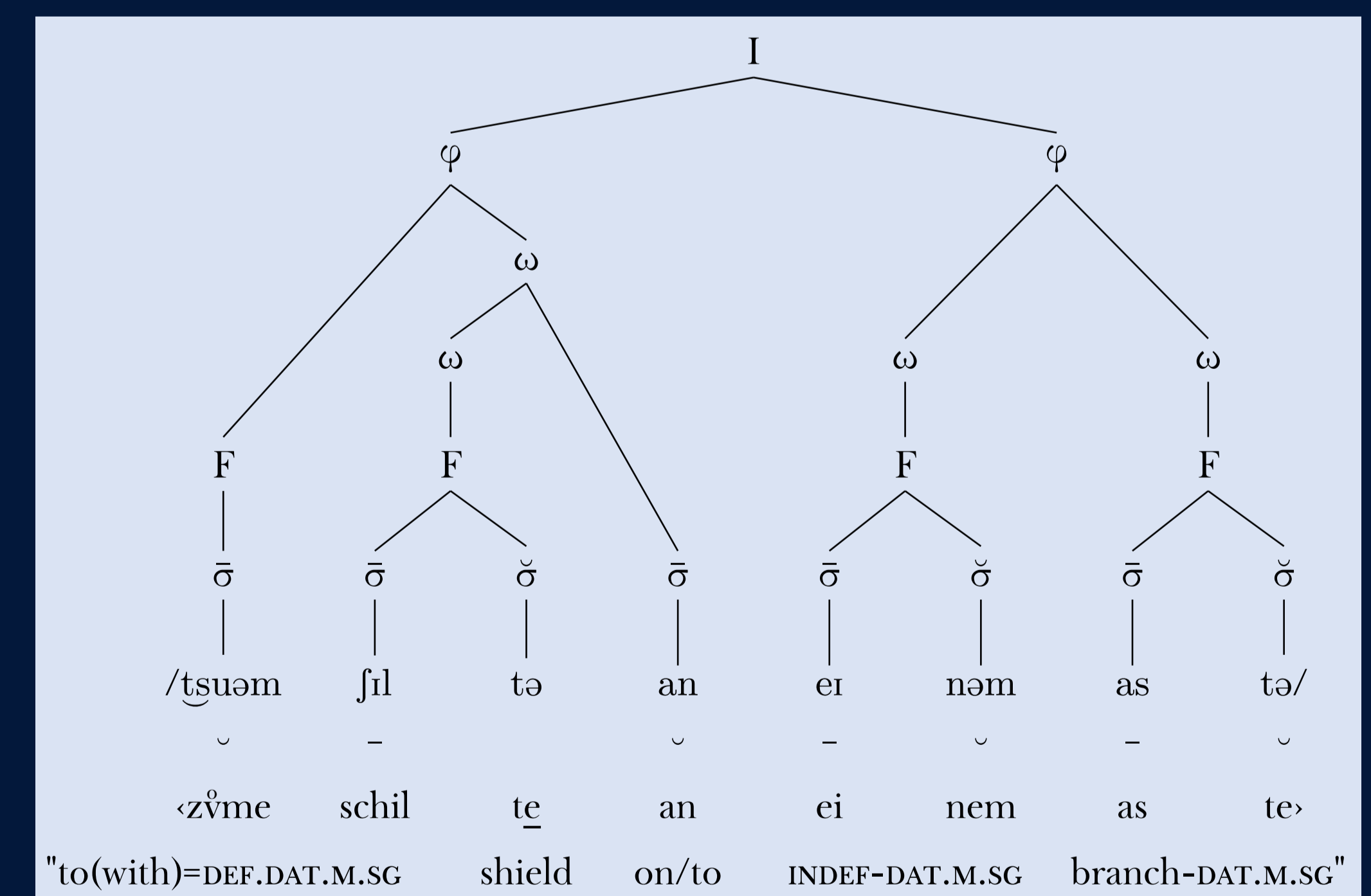
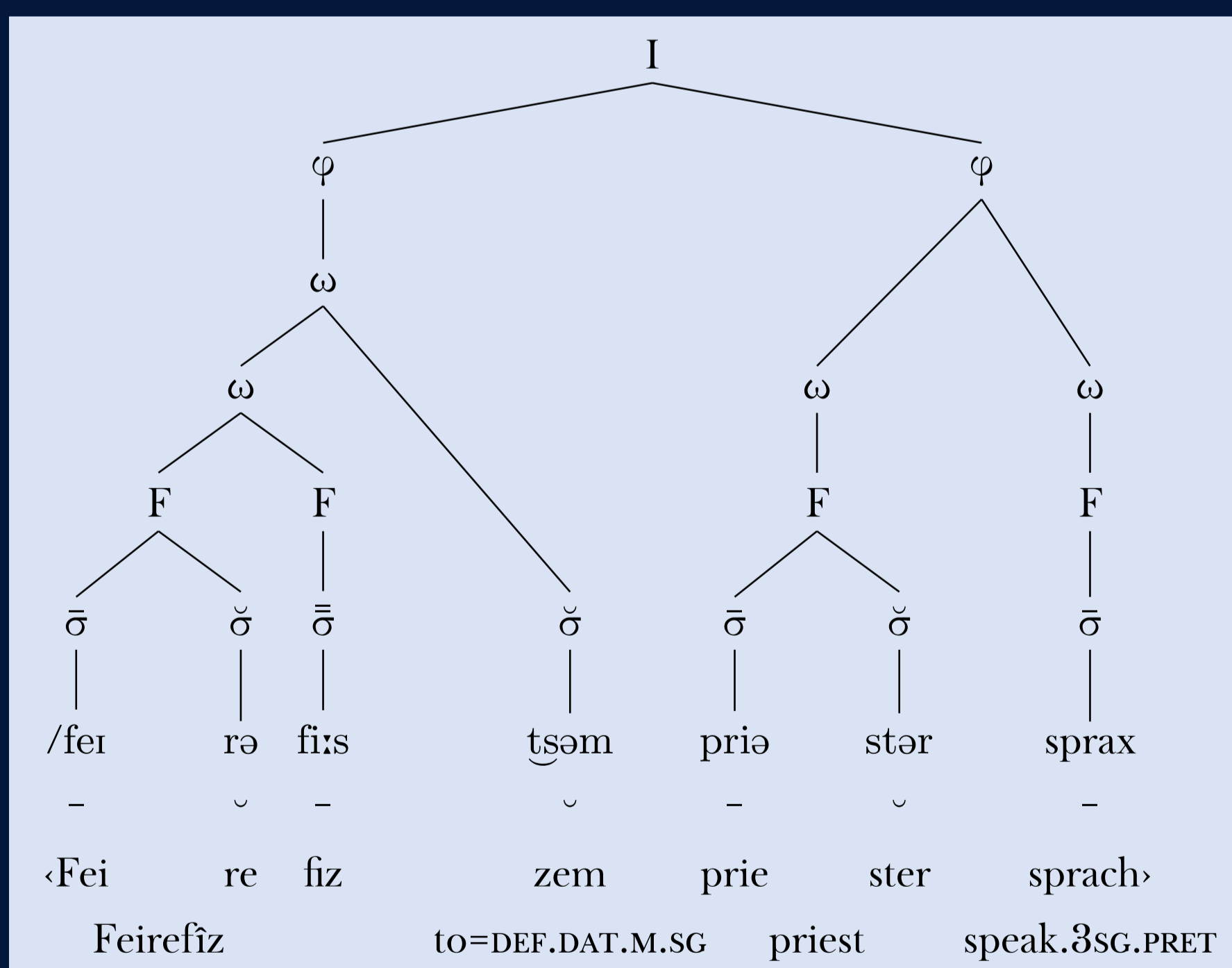
- (a) In the unmarked case (66%), [FNC FNC] sequences form a single syllable which occupies the weak branch of a verse foot.
- (b) In verse (or due to focus in natural language), monosyllabic VFs can form a F and project a ω , attracting stress and surfacing unreduced (cf. Selkirk 1995).
- (c) However, this is rare. More frequently, they form a disyllabic F. If the **preposition** heads the F, the article can encliticise in the weak branch.
- (d) The **article** only attracts stress as a demonstrative or pronoun, which precludes a VF. Instead, the preposition encliticises to a preceding host.
- (e) Unreduced < $z\check{v}$ > only occurs in φ -initial position, where it cannot encliticise and thus projects its own F.

However, this amounts to a **repair mechanism**; when the VF is not φ -initial, it is reduced, essentially defooted to facilitate encliticisation (always occupying a weak branch of a verse F, following a strong head).

- (a) — U — U — U —
225.08 *einen er ime sciffe sach.*
INDEF.ACC.M.SG he in= DEF.DAT.M.SG ship-DAT see.3.SG.PRET
- (b) U — U — U — U —
71.18 *da[z] zer Mvn.ta ne an kō.ka.sas*
REL.ACC.N.SG to=DEF.DAT.F.SG mountain at Caucasus
- (c) U — U — U — U —
251.25 *Der Waleis z \check{v} der meide sprach.*
DEF.NOM.M.SG Waleis to=DEF.DEF.F.SG maiden speak.3.SG.PRET
- (d) U — U — U — U —
698.05 *ze dem der dort min her.ce tregt.*
to DEF.DAT.M.SG him REL.NOM.M.SG there my heart bear.3.SG
- (e) U — U — U — U —
282.11 *[v̆f einem plan] $_{\varphi}$ [[z \check{v}] $_F$ [[dem] $_{\omega}$ =er] $_{\omega}$ [sleich] $_{\omega}$] $_{\varphi}$.*
on INDEF.DAT.M.SG meadow to REL.DAT.M.SG he go.slowly.3.SG.PRET

The facts of MHG cliticisation are consistent with nested ω s: $[[LEX]_{\omega}=FNC]_{\omega}$. The reduced FNC (or VF), incapable of forming a F, is adjoined as a σ to the higher-level ω .

The trochaic nature of Germanic accounts for the asymmetry between encliticisation and “procliticisation” in MHG. Arguments against recursive ω s only hold if procliticisation is the default. It is likely that such procliticisation represents a different prosodic structure (e.g. Kabak & Schiering’s $[[FNC=FNC]_{\varphi}=[LEX]_{\omega}\dots]_{\varphi}$).



Conclusions

VFs enjoyed great productivity in MHG and provide further evidence for the diachronic stability of trochaic phrasing in German. This research takes a prosodic perspective and suggests that MHG VFs were productively formed by encliticising a reduced definite article to a preceding preposition. Such VFs formed an unambiguously left-headed F which was capable of forming a minimal ω under focus.

VFs could then themselves be reduced and defooted, encliticising to a preceding LEX and forming a recursive ω : $[[[sprach]_{\omega}=[zem]_{\sigma}]_{\omega}[gaste]_{\omega}]_{\varphi}$ (“spoke to the guest”). **In the default case, clitics cannot form a F alone and must attach as a single σ to a ω host, i.e. $[[LEX]_{\omega}=FNC]_{\omega}$.**

Procliticisation is only permitted φ -initially, where the VF must form its own F in lieu of a permissible host. In such cases, it is possible that clitics are less tightly associated, possibly adjoined to the φ , accounting for the phonological asymmetries between enclitics and proclitics in MHG.