Middle High German: Syntax

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1. Introduction to Historical Linguistics and Middle High German
2. Phonology I
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Grammaticalisation

Coined by Meillet (1912)

The movement from a (more) lexical (LEX) to a (more) grammatical (GRAMM) meaning/word/form (cf. Kuryłowicz 1965)

> e.g. from LEX verb to auxiliary, or from a derivational to an inflexional affix.

Movement in the other direction is very scarce

> → the very existence of 'degrammaticaliasation' is controversial

- *-ish*
- *-ism*
- *-s*

Grammaticalisation

Grammaticalisation is a gradual process involving movement along a continuum (or 'cline'), with purely lexical content at one end and purely functional content at the other:

Content word > function word > clitic > affix > phonological material > ∅

Semantic 'bleaching'

Phonological reduction

Reanalysis

Newmeyer (2001):
We need a theory/model for these three, but does grammaticalisation need a unified theory? Does it have any properties beyond those of bleaching, reduction and reanalysis?

English *will* ('want') > *will* (auxiliary: FUT) > *'ll* (clitic)

Is grammaticalisation really a *process*?

Grammaticalisation

It is often regarded as being related to the competing drives for 'economy' (saying something as 'easily' and briefly as possible) and 'clarity' (being easily understood) (cf. Geurts 2000)

→ In this way, gradual phonological reduction generally accompanies grammaticalisation, until clarity is impaired and periphrastic material is added to counter this, eventually becoming subject to erosion itself (cf. 'Jespersen's Cycle')

The history of negative expressions in various languages makes us witness the following curious fluctuation: the original negative adverb is first weakened, then found insufficient and therefore strengthened, generally through some additional word, and this in its turn may be felt as the negative proper and may then in course of time be subject to the same development as the original word (Jespersen 1917: 4).

*For more information on clines and cycles (including the grammaticalisation cline and Jespersen's cycle), see Hock (2021: 351–366)
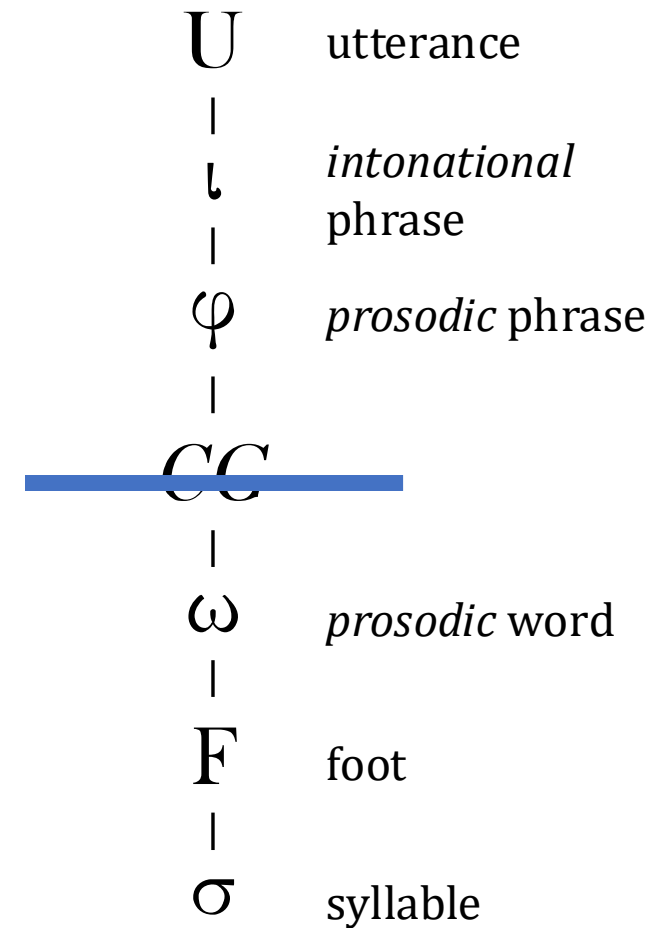
Recap: Phonological reduction

Not a special mechanism of change—general phonological change

May have diachronic *consequences*

Refers to phonological reduction or lenition

May involve movement down the prosodic hierarchy

U   utterance

| *intonational* phrase

φ   *prosodic* phrase

CC

ω   *prosodic* word

F   foot

σ   syllable

Nespor & Vogel (1986)

Phonological reduction

Often seen as an integral part of *grammaticalisation*

Closely linked to reanalysis

Visible in *cliticisation*

i.e. the reduction of full prosodic words to sub-minimal units which 'lean' on a neighbouring prosodic word: e.g. *fish'n chips*

[habɪçs] (< habe=ich=es 'I have it')

[hastəs] (< hast=du=es 'you have it')

[hatɐs] (< hat=er=es 'he has it') &c.

cf. Lahiri & Plank (2010, 2022), Booth (2023)

Function words

FNCs closed class of words: determiners, prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, particles and auxiliaries

Play important role in syntax & often head phrased (e.g. PP or DP)

Treated as weaker units in the phonology

Definitions thus usually refer to them being 'reducible', lacking prominence or being somehow phonologically 'weak'

Rarely form full prosodic words unless focused (cf. Selkirk 1996)

'Strong', focused forms → contrast with 'weak' forms

Weak forms are sub-minimal and 'cliticise' (lean on) the nearest full prosodic word—usually a LEX (e.g. noun or verb)—which acts as host

Phonological reduction

	'Strong' form	'Weak' form	Clitic form	Gloss
Pronoun	duː	dʊ	də	*du* '2SG.NOM'
	viːɐ̯	viɐ̯, vɪɐ̯	vɐ	*wir* '1PL.NOM'
Article	aɪnən	aɪnː	nən, n	*einen* 'INDEF.ACC.M.SG'
	deːn	den	dən, n	*den* 'DEF.ACC.M.SG'
Preposition	ɪn		(ə)n, n	*in* 'in'
	fyːɐ̯	fyɐ̯	fʏɐ̯	*für* 'for'
Conjunction	ʊnt	ʊn	(ə)n	*und* 'and'
	viː	vi	vɪ	*wie* 'how'
Particle	maːl	mal	ma	*mal* 'once'[a]
	ʃoːn	ʃon	ʃn	*schon* 'already'
Auxiliary	haːbən, haːbm̩	haːm	ham	*haben* 'have INF'
	veːɐ̯dən, veːɐ̯dn̩	veːɐ̯n	veɐ̯n	*werden* 'become INF'
	ɪst		ɪs	*ist* 'be 3SG.PRES'

Clitics

Distinct from affixes

More loosely attached to their host

→ Can usually be exchanged with their full form with little/no change in meaning

Crucial point: the reduced form cannot form a full prosodic word and needs a host
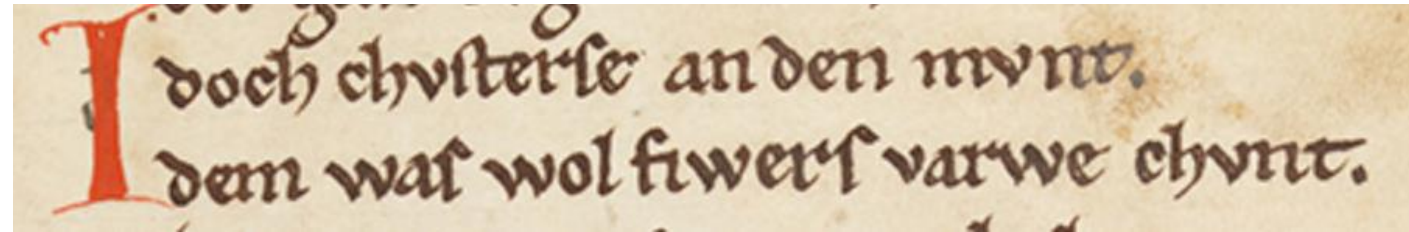
Example prosodic structure of a LEX FNC FNC sequence with (a) both FNCs reduced and cliticised and (b) the second FNC focused.

a. $(((ziːt)_\omega=ɐ=zə)_\omega)_\varphi$ *Sieht er sie?* 'Did he see her?'
    see.3SG.PRES=he.NOM=she.ACC

b. $(((ziːt)_\omega=ɐ)_\omega)_\varphi ((ziː)_\omega)_\varphi$ *Sieht er* SIE*?* 'Did he see HER?'
    see.3SG.PRES=he.NOM she.ACC
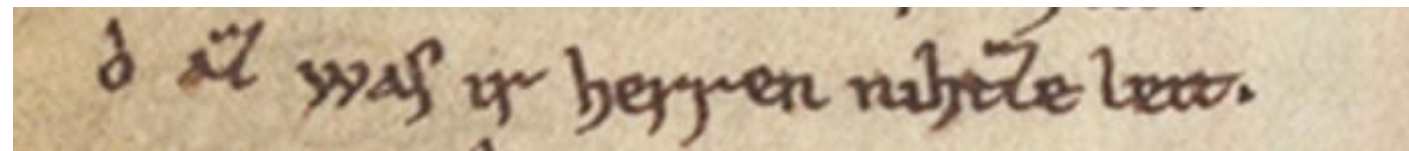
Cliticisation in MHG
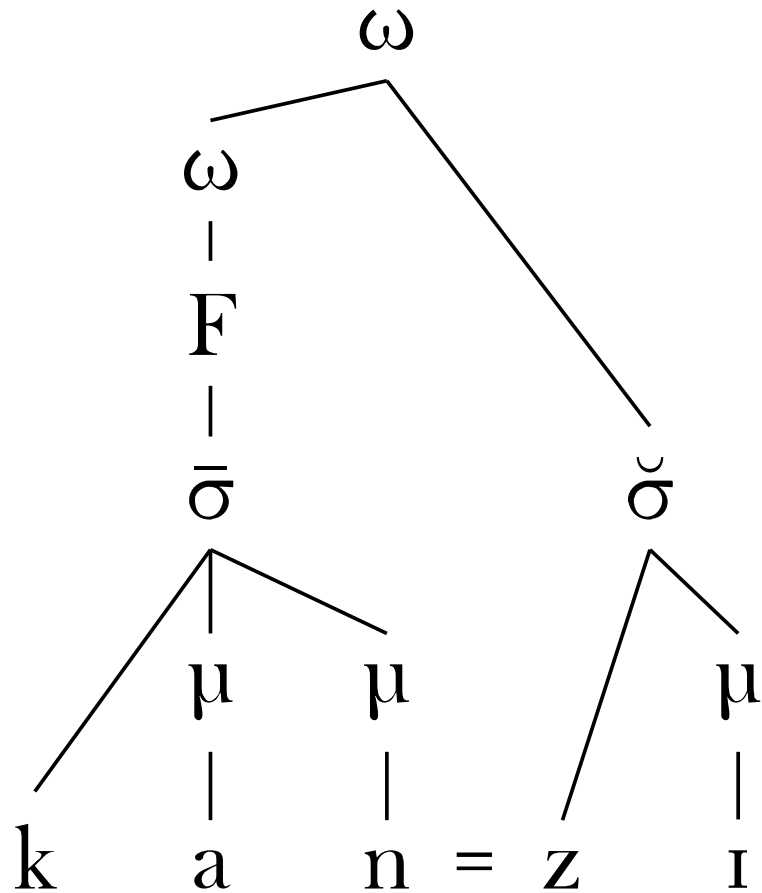
kann sie 'can she'

Idoch chvst**er****se** an den mvnt. 176.09

'kiss-PRET=he.NOM=she.ACC' < *kuste er si*
St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. 857

daz waſ ir herren niht**ze** leit. 59.20

'not=too' < *niht ze*
München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm 19

Booth (2023)

Verschmelzungsformen

Fused forms resulting from the encliticisation of a reduced article to a preceding function word, e.g. [ts̯ʊm] (< *zu=dem* 'to the').

Arise in OHG and characteristic of MHG and NHG (greater variety in MHG, dialects and Ugs. than standard.

- Phonologically opaque and not synchronically derivable (although see Wiese 1988, 2000)

- Maximally disyllabic, but also monosyllabic (a trochee: cf. Booth 2023; Nübling 2005; Wiese 1988)

- Can be obligatory or ungrammatical, depending on the preposition and the article and their role in a sentence

- Most frequently found with *=s* and *=m*: Never with *die* or *der* in the **standard** (with the notable exception of *zur*)

Verschmelzungsformen

OHG [t͡si=dɛmo] > [t͡sd̥ɛmo] > [t͡sɛmo] > [t͡sɛm(ə)] > [t͡səm]

→ MHG reanalysis of [t͡səm] as [t͡sə=m] → [t͡suəm] *zuom(e)*

Built on strong form of *zuo* (weak form *ze*)
In OHG, the adverb and preposition were distinct

OHG contractions of *zi* + definite article.

a. *zëmo/zëm < zi thëmo* 'to def.dat.m.sg'
b. *zëru/zër < zi thëru* 'to def.dat.f.sg'
c. *zës < zi thës* 'to def.gen.m/n.sg'
d. *zēn < zi thēn* 'to def.dat.pl'

Verschmelzungsformen

OHG [ʦi=dɛmo] > [ʦd̥ɛmo] > [ʦɛmo] > [ʦɛm(ə)] > [ʦəm]

→ MHG reanalysis of [ʦəm] as [ʦə=m] → [ʦuəm] *zuom(e)*

Built on strong form of *zuo* (weak form *ze*)
In OHG, the adverb and preposition were distinct

Verschmelzungsformen are further along the grammaticalisation cline than personal pronouns (more tightly fused to their host)

• Morphologised

• Often obligatory

• Not synchronically derivable

• Restrictions on their base

• MHG more 'experimental' period

• Inflected prepositions?? Cf. Nübling (1992, 2005)

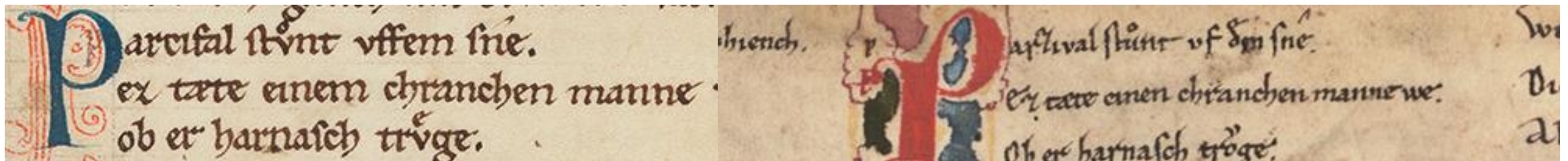# Middle High German (13ᵗʰ century)

437.19   Er gert ir anz venſter dar.

'to=DET.N.ACC'   < *an=daz*
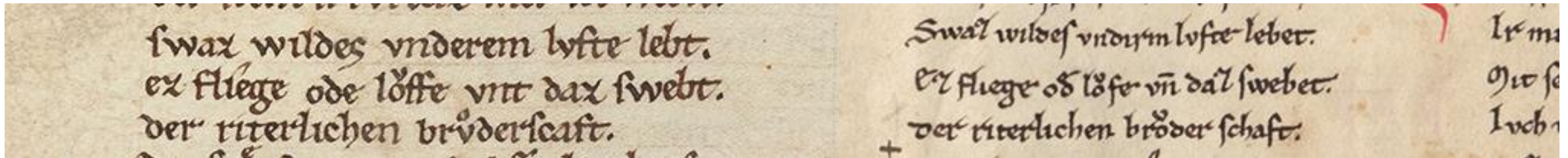

59.20   Parcival ſtv̊nt vffem ſnê.

'on=DET.M.DAT'   < *ûf=dem*

Middle High German (13th century)

437.19   Swaz wildeſ vndir**m** lvfte lebet.

'under=DET.M.DAT' < *under=dem*

Gmc. Grammaticalisation

Throughout the history of Gmc., prosodic structures have been left-leaning

i.e. *en*cliticisation is preferred over *pro*cliticisation

it's, *(s)he'll*, *gonna*, ***ain'tcha*** [ɛnʧʃə] **>>** **'tis**, willy-nilly (< *ne=will=I/he/ye*)

'Tis but a scratch.

Gmc. Grammaticalisation: The dental preterite

Throughout the history of Gmc., prosodic structures have been left-leaning

 i.e. *en*cliticisation is preferred over *pro*cliticisation

Even if this goes against the syntactic phrasing!

 e.g. *drinka pinta milk* vs. [drink [a [pint [of milk]]]]

→Almost all Germanic inflexion is suffixal

 enclitic > phonologically bound form > morphologically bound form / suffix

Dental preterite of weak verbs < PGmc. auxiliary
ded- 'do, make PRET' < PIE *dhe-dheH₁-*

Gmc. Grammaticalisation: The dental preterite

Weak verbs could not undergo ablaut (inherited, synthetic past)

→ Periphrastic construction comprising weak verb and inflected form of *did:*

ROOT + /j/ (→ *UML and gemination*) + X + *did*

Initially two independent words (Stage I)

did encliticises to the stem (Stage II)

'Univerbation' → creation of suffixes from enclitics (Stage IV)

There is debate as to which form of the verb *do* combined with; the suffix 'X' might have been infinitival, adjectivalising/nominalising, resultative etc.

Possibly via STAGE III, where the dental is reanalysed as a stem extension, signalling weak verb class & forming the past root (cf. PST.PTCP form with /t/)

STAGE I $((\text{ROOT-/j/-X})_\omega \, (do\text{-TNS.MOOD.PRS.NMB})_\omega)_\varphi$

STAGE II $((\text{ROOT-/j/-X})_\omega = do\text{-TNS.MOOD.PRS.NMB})_\omega$

STAGE III $([\text{ROOT-/j/-}d]_{\text{PRET ROOT}}\text{-MOOD.PRS.NMB})_\omega$

STAGE IV $(\text{ROOT-}d_{\text{PRET}}\text{-MOOD.PRS.NMB})_\omega$

cf. Lahiri (2000), Kiparsky (2009), Lahiri & Plank (2010)

Grammaticalisation in MHG

Development of *werden* as an auxiliary in periphrastic constructions:

☞ Future tense

☞ Passive voice

Note that analytic constructions can *become* synthetic, as with the dental PRET

☞ Later: conditional meaning

   e.g. weak verbs where the PRET.SUBJ and PRET.INDIC forms were identical

Contrasts with the inherited (synthetic) tenses and moods, e.g. the PRET, PRES and SUBJ, which were marked via verbal inflexion.

☞ OHG > MHG > NHG: Movement from (more) synthetic to (more) analytical language

*For a detailed overview of syntactic changes, see Wright (1955: 60f.), Paul (2007) and Jones & Jones (2019, 2024)

Tense: Preterite

Can convey any past action

Finer-grained delineation of the past is less observable than in later stages of the language

The PRET form can have perfective meaning (where the past event has a bearing on the present, or is viewed subjectively)

ich liez ein lant dâ ich krône truoc   Pz 441,06

Especially for verbs with an inherently perfective meaning

In successive, related clauses, the PRET can follow a periphrastic PERF form with the same meaning

ôwê frowe unde wîp, wer hât benomn mir dînen lîp? erwarp mit rîterschaft
mîn hant dîn werde minn, krôn und ein lant?   Pz 302,07–10

Tense: Preterite

Can often have pluperfect meaning, particularly in:

a. Forms prefixed with *ge-*

   Als der künic Gunther die rede vol *gesprach**, Hagene der küene den guoten Rüedegêren sach*   NL 1181,3f.

b. Subordinate clauses

   dô du von ir *schiede**, zehant sie starp*   Pz 476,26

Tense: Perfect

Fully-formed as an analytic construction in OHG (with minor differences)

MHG has much the same form as today:

Inflected form of *hân* or *sîn* + PST.PTCP

Ordinary meaning is perfective

The PRET is also often used to express the perfect (as we have seen)

Can sometimes convey a future perfect meaning (due to the present form of the auxiliary):

> *is rother dar under, den have wir schire wnden*   Ro 3914

> *i.e. 'we will soon have found him!'*

The pluperfect is formed as the PERF, but with the PRET form of *hân/sîn*

> *dô sî ditz hâten vernomen, dô sprach der rîter mittem leun*   Iw 6108

Tense: The *ge*- prefix

Unlike NHG, the prefix *ge*- can be added to almost any verb and gives it perfective force

→implies completion of the action

      e.g. *sitzen* 'be sitting' vs. *ge-sitzen* 'sit down'

Unlike NHG, when the meaning of the verb is already perfective, it forms its PST.PTCP without *ge*- in MHG

e.g. *brâht*, *komen*, *worden* (not *gebrâht*, *gekomen*, *geworden*)

      cf. NHG *gebracht, gekommen, geworden*

Tense: The *ge*- prefix

Added to the PRES, *ge*- often results in a future perfect meaning:

swenne iuwer sun gewahset   'when your son has (=will have) grown up'

With the PRET, it has pluperfect meaning:

dô ich in gesach   'when I had seen him'

Tense: Future

More markedly different from NHG

Gmc: Just uses the present tense

OHG: Develops periphrastic constructions with modal verbs:

    wish, obligation, possibility → futurity

MHG: Lots of variation—various modal verbs competing

Can still simply use the present:

☞ *bin ich gnislīch, sô genise ich*   'if I'm curable, I'll recover'

In the same way, the PERF can be used for the future perfect:

☞ *daz ist schiere getân*   'that will soon have been done'

Tense: Future

However, the modal strategy has become very successful

Competing forms:

sol + infinitive   *(oldest: appears in OHG)*

    swaz der küneginne liebes geschiht, des sol ich ir wol gunnen   NL 1204,2f.

muoʒ + infinitive   *(rarer: better retains modal sense)*

    des muoz ich zer werlde immer schande hân   NL 1248,3

wil + infinitive   *(mostly modal, but unambiguous future readings)*

    […] ich sol iv sagen mer, waz iv min lieber herre her enboten hat

        (Nibelungenlied B 1195,2f., C13[th])

    […] so wil ich sagen mer, waz iu min lieber herre her enboten hat

        (Nibelungenlied I, 1323)

Tense: Future

Very rare (in both OHG and MHG) is *werden* + infinitive

Ultimately wins out over the modal verbs, but only firmly established by C16th

Origins disputed, but proposed to have come from *werden* + PRES.PTCP

    Inchoative (start of state/action) > temporal (future event)

    Jâ wirt ir dienende vil manic wætlicher man   NL 1210,4

Paul (2007): Get *werden* + INF from 2nd half of C14th

    Seems to be a mix of the PRES.PTCP and the (initially inflected) INF.

Tense: Future

Questionable whether there was ever an original construction with the INF.

Could be due to (i) reduction or (ii) analogy to the modal constructions (or a mix)

e.g. *-ende > -enne > -ene > -en*

sô wirt er sprechen (B)
sô wirt er sprechende (H)
Flore 4656 (both C15th MSS)

Tense: Present participle

The PRES.PTCP can also indicate continuous action when combined with *sîn* (like in English):

    daz er im bitende wese   'that he may continually pray for him'

Mood

MHG uses the subjective in many more contexts than NHG, e.g. after:

☞ Imperatives

nu sehet wie genæme er ê der werlte wære

☞ Generalising indefinite pronouns

swer daʒ tuo

☞ Comparatives

und wirde werder danne ich sî

☞ Wishes (*müeʒe* = NHG *möge*)

din sêle müeʒe wol gevarn

Mood

The PRET subjunctive expresses unreal conditions in both the present and past:

>   du *vertrüegest* doch wol mînen tôt

>   und *sæhe* eʒ niht her Hartmuot

The periphrastic construction with *würde* + INF does not exist in MHG

However, the subjunctive form *wolde* can be combined with the perfect infinitive to form a construction like English 'would have X-ed'

>   er *wolde* in *erslagen hân*   'he would have slain him'

The perfect infinitive is used generally with the PRET forms of the modal verbs (*mugen, suln, müezen, kunnen, durfen, wellen*) to express unreal past events. This is a MHG (C12th development), following an older construction with a plain INF.

Voice

Formed analytically from the outset (cf. Gothic)

→ Even in OHG, it is formed much like NHG

Relevant only for transitive verbs

The passive turns a transitive verb into an intransitive one

Eventive (*werden* + past participle) vs. stative (*sîn* + past participle)

Not quite as consistent as in NHG

Many examples of *sîn*-passive to express eventive passive:

mir ist noch vil selten gescenket bezzer wîn

NL 2116.3

Such cases can often be ambiguous: perfect tense or eventive passive?

Voice

Very rarely find three-part passives in MHG (only occasionally from C13[th])

e.g. *Ich bin/war gesehen worden*

Just as rare with *sîn* as *werden*

nu wasez ouch über des jâres zil, daz Gahmuret geprîset vil was worden dâ ze Zazamanc   Pz 57,29–58,01

in senender nôt bin ich begraben gewesen lange stunde   KvW, Troj Kr 16948f

Often find *sîn*-passive used in the perfect & past perfect, whether eventive or stative:

Pres.	ich wirde gelobet
Pret.	ich wart gelobet
Perf.	ich bin gelobet
Past perf.	ich was gelobet

i.e. referring to an earlier event which resulted in a given state

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