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Origin and Spread of the Personal Pronoun *They*: *La Estorie del Evangelie,* a Case Study

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1   Introduction

There are few features of the English language that have traditionally epitomised the influence of Old Norse on English more than the 3pl. personal pronouns *they*, *their*, *them*. The modern-day forms derive from the *þei*(-), *þai*(-) and *þe*(-) type 3pl. pronouns that appeared in Middle English and gradually replaced the reflexes of the Old English pronouns *hīe*, *hira*, *him*. The traditional view holds that the Middle English *þ*-type pronouns derive from the Old Norse 3pl. pronouns *þeir*, *þeira*, *þeim*. The transfer of such grammatical material is considered indicative of the intensity of Anglo-Scandinavian contact and the typological proximity of

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the two languages (Thomason and Kaufman 1988: 274–304). Recent studies, however, indicate that there is scope for a re-evaluation of the Norse influence on the development of English (e.g. Pons-Sanz 2013; Dance et al. 2019; see also Versloot's paper in this volume). This also applies to the origin of *they*, *their*, *them*. Developing some tentative suggestions in the literature (e.g. Ogura 2001), Cole (2018) is the first to systematically challenge the pronouns' Norse origin. She argues that the Northern Middle English *þ*-type pronouns derived from the Old English demonstratives *þā* (*þāra*, *þām*) via a process of reanalysis from demonstrative to personal pronoun. Internal changes to the functional distribution of the Old Northumbrian demonstratives thus created a system that lined up with the distribution of the Norse cognate forms and was reinforced, but not triggered, by language contact (see also Cole Forthcoming).

By shifting the focus away from the categorical *þ*-type paradigm of Northern Middle English discussed in Cole (2018) to investigate the mixed *h*-type and *þ*-type paradigms of the West and South-West Midlands, this chapter offers a new account of the dynamics of the pronominal replacement process and their implications for the etymology of the *þ*-type pronouns. We depart from scholarly tradition in two respects. In terms of etymology, we do not presuppose two common assumptions: (i) the *þ*-type pronouns were the product of language contact alone and (ii) the appearance of *þ*-type pronouns beyond the heavily Scandinavianised areas was the result of dialect contact alone. Not taking these assumptions for granted and adopting the innovative, multifaceted methodology outlined below, enables us to challenge the seemingly strong foundations on which the common understanding of the pronouns' etymology has rested for many years. Our findings indicate that the *þ*-type pronouns were the result of polygenesis, i.e. that reflexes of Old English demonstrative pronouns co-existed with and were reinforced by their Norse-derived cognates.

To investigate the replacement process itself, we examine the linguistic, stylistic and scribal pathways that led to it. Several studies analyse the internal and external factors that motivated the substitution process based on pronoun usage either in a particular text / dialect (e.g. Johannesson 1995; Ritt 2001; Bergs 2005) or in a collection of texts, thus providing diatopic and diachronic scope but not in-depth analysis of

textual choices (e.g. Smith 2001; Morse-Gagné 2003; Stenroos 2005). The present study takes a different approach, focusing instead on the pronominal usage recorded in the seven manuscripts of the Middle English poem known as *La estorie del evangelie* (hereafter *Estorie*). The examination of 3pl. pronouns in various dialectal rewritings of a single text provides us with directly comparable data that allow for the exploration of the pronouns' distribution and diffusion in relation to other dialects. This focus also opens up several layers of analysis, including the potential influence of linguistic and stylistic factors, and that of scribal behaviour. We study how scribes from *different* dialectal areas responded to the (near-)categorical þ-type system of the early exemplars of *Estorie*, and how scribes from the *same* dialectal area adapted (and possibly adopted) the different pronominal systems of their exemplars at a local level. At the intrascribal level, our method allows for a comparison of pronominal patterns in *Estorie* to those in other texts penned by the same scribe, a task facilitated by the electronic version of the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English* (*eLALME*; Benskin et al. 2013–). In addition to providing a diatopic and scribal perspective, we also contextualise pronoun usage in *Estorie* diachronically—particularly in the South-West and West Midlands versions—by comparing pronoun use in relevant versions to earlier usage in the same dialectal areas on the basis of the *Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English* (*LAEME*; Laing 2013–).

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 introduces the text and its manuscripts. Section 3 uses our novel method to thoroughly scrutinise the 3pl. pronoun forms found in the various versions of *Estorie* and takes a nuanced approach to considering how scribal responses to the exemplar interact with linguistic and stylistic conditioning. The paper concludes with a summary of findings in Sect. 4.

2   *La estorie del evangelie* and Its Manuscripts

Estorie is a metrical account of Christ's life. In spite of its Anglo-French title, which derives from the brief introduction to its fragment in the Vernon manuscript, it is an early Middle English text. Its exact date and place of composition remain unknown, although its origin is generally

placed in late thirteenth-century North-West Norfolk / North-East Cambridgeshire / South Lincolnshire because of the date of its earliest witness and the linguistic features shared by the various manuscripts (Millward 1998: 56–64). Perhaps because of its fragmentary character, and in spite of what it has to offer for our understanding of Middle English dialectology (e.g. Pons-Sanz 2021), this text has received hardly any scholarly attention from historical linguists, who tend to focus on other compositions from its general dialectal area, such as the *Ormulum*, *Genesis and Exodus* or *Havelok the Dane*.

Estorie is preserved in seven manuscripts, none of which is a copy of another (Millward 1998: 45):[1]

D = Dulwich College, MS XXII (519 lines—beginning to l. 528—in fols 81ᵛ–85ᵛ; *c.*1300, South Lincolnshire; *LAEME* dulwicht.tag): the fragment of *Estorie* is the only English text written by the relevant scribe. This version of *Estorie* is the closest to the original in dialect and date but it seems to incorporate a number of additions (e.g. ll. 69–144, 151–178 and 269–282), as these lines, which are unique to D, differ in content and metrical structure from those around them (see Millward 1998: 25).

P = Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson C 655 (262 lines—ll. 853–1057, 1388–1389, 1727–1844—in various folios; *c.*1350, Somerset; *eLALME* LP 5220): the whole manuscript, written in one hand, contains a version of the *Northern Passion* that integrates lines from *Estorie*. This version of *Estorie* is not directly connected to any of the other extant texts. The language of the manuscript shows various dialectal layers, with northern forms co-existing alongside Midland and southern forms (Foster 1914: 24–26). Both *Estorie* and the *Northern Passion* show dialectal mixture. This suggests that the Somerset scribe relied (directly or ultimately) on an exemplar copied further north than South Lincolnshire / North-West Norfolk which had already incorporated lines from *Estorie* into the *Northern Passion* (Millward 1998: 73). While copying his exemplar, the scribe substi-

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[1] Millward's (1998) edition is the primary source for our discussion of the textual coverage of the fragments and stemmatic relations. Line numbers refer to her reconstructed text.

tuted some of his southern forms, which resulted in a Mischsprache (e.g. we find occasional examples of the southern voicing of /f/ together with typically northern unpalatalised instances of the modal auxiliary *shal*).

V = Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Poet a.1, also known as the Vernon Manuscript (396 lines—beginning to l. 574—in fol. 105ʳ–ᵛ; *c.*1390, North Worcestershire; *eLALME* LP 7630, based on a sample of texts by Scribe B not including *Estorie*): this manuscript is the work of two scribes. Our scribe, known as Scribe B, copied most of the approx. 350 texts in this impressive collection of religious texts, while Scribe A was responsible for rubrics, foliation and some materials in the first quire (*eLALME* LP 7670; see further Horobin 2013). The texts copied by Scribe B originated from different dialectal areas: e.g. ll. 9899–10818 from Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne* (South Lincolnshire), with some adaptation to a western audience (Perry 2013: 86–87, fn. 46); texts by Richard Rolle (South Yorkshire); and a copy of the A-text of Langland's *Piers Plowman*, a text with Worcestershire connections but probably copied from an eastern exemplar (Samuels 1985). The texts also have chronological depth: e.g. besides *Estorie*, the manuscript includes a copy of *Ancrene Riwle*, which was probably originally penned in Herefordshire around two centuries before. Despite this diversity, the fact that the scribe's language can be associated with late fourteenth-century North Worcestershire suggests that he (and / or the authors of his exemplars; cf. Doyle 1990: 9–10) undertook both dialectal translation and modernisation to make the texts comprehensible and relevant to contemporary local audiences. However, his texts also show significant phonological and morphological variation, probably as a result of constrained scribal response to the exemplars (Görlach 1974: 103; Horobin and Smith 2011; Smith 2013, 2020: 85–88).[2] Notably, though, Smith (2013: 63) points out

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[2] Benskin and Laing (1981: 75) define *constrained usage* as 'the accommodation of a scribe's own repertoire to that of the exemplar, which accommodation does not extend to the reproduction of exotic forms' and explain that 'the relative frequencies obtaining between variants in the scribe's spontaneous usage may be much altered by adherence to the usage of an exemplar'. Although they focus on orthographic and phonological matters, this explanation can also account for morphosyntactic and lexical issues.

that this variation does not go beyond what one would expect in South-West Midland usage. This observation also applies to the scribe's pronominal usage (see Sect. 3.1).

S = London, University of London Library, MS Sterling V. 17, also known as the Clopton Manuscript (1764 lines—beginning to l. 1974—in fols 97ᵛ–111ᵛ; *c.*1400, North Worcestershire; *eLALME* LP 7650): this manuscript was part of a larger manuscript written in a single hand which also comprised Washington, D C, Folger Library, MS V.b.236 and Princeton University Library, R. H. Taylor MS 10. The Sterling part also includes a copy of the C-text of *Piers Plowman* and the *Assumption of Our Lady*, the Folger part includes Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne* and *Meditations on the Supper of Our Lord* and the Taylor part has a copy of *Mandeville's Travels*. The texts exhibit different dialects: while *Handlyng Synne* and *Meditations* were copied in a non-uniform East Midlands dialect (Perry 2007: 142), the other texts reflect a range of West Midlands dialects; *eLALME* places *Estorie* in North-West Worcestershire but *Piers Plowman* in South-West Worcestershire (*eLALME* LP 7780), the area to which Perry (2007: 141) attributes the language of *Mandeville's Travels*. He suggests that the West Midlands dialect in *Assumption* could also be associated with Worcestershire, although this association is less certain (2007: 141–142). This leads him to conclude that it is likely that 'the scribe copied these texts *literatim* rather than imposing dialectal conformity on the exemplars used' (2007: 142) and that we might actually be dealing with a scribe from London (2007: 138, 140, 142). The Clopton and Vernon manuscripts share a number of texts; while their copies of various other texts (e.g. *Handlyng Synne*; see Sullens 1983: xxii) are not directly related, those of *Estorie* can be said to go back to a shared exemplar (see further Turville-Petre 1990; and Sect. 3).

B = Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Additional C 38 (1703 lines—beginning to l. 2435—in fols. 71ᵛ–82ʳ; 1410–1420, Worcestershire): *Estorie* is here preceded and followed by parts of the *South English Legendary*. Even though its exemplar is likely to share the same source as the exemplar of V and S, this version of *Estorie* differs significantly from those in V and S because it has been shortened and its language has been normalised and modernised, as is the case with the other texts in

the manuscript (Görlach 1974: 106; Millward 1997; and Pons-Sanz 2021).

R = London, British Library, MS Royal 17 C XVII (501 lines—ll. 1905–2441—in fols 152ᵛ–155ᵛ; early fifteenth century, North Lincolnshire; *eLALME* LP 45, based on a sample of texts not including *Estorie*): this large late-medieval collection of devotional texts including *Estorie* was penned by a single hand and exhibits overall dialectal consistency across the various texts (Millward 1998: 73–75). Thus, even though *eLALME*'s linguistic profile is not based on the extract from *Estorie*, the forms for the 3pl. pronouns that it reports (mainly *yai* for THEY, *yam*, for THEM and *yer* for THEIR, with <y> for <þ>) are aligned with those in our text.

L = London, British Library, MS Lansdowne 388 (515 lines—ll. 1879–2404—in fols 373ʳ–380ᵛ; fifteenth century, Central East Midlands; Pickering 1972: 46): besides the lines from *Estorie*, fols 368ʳ–380ᵛ, also by the same hand, include a collection of doctrinal, moralistic and medicinal prose texts, and an account of how to interpret dreams known as *Daniel's Dreams*. Most of the didactic material remains unedited and the short treatise on dreams (Bühler 1962: 266–267) only includes two examples of 3pl. pronouns, viz. two *h*-type objective forms (ll. 6 and 20). Accordingly, it is difficult to place the pronominal use in our text into a wider context of scribal trends. L and R share a number of readings for *Estorie* not found in the other versions, but they are less closely aligned than V and S, or even S and B.

3   Third-Person Pronoun Usage in the *Estorie* Texts

3.1   General Distribution of the Data in Their Manuscript Context

Table 11.1 summarises the pronoun variants for THEY, THEIR, THEM in the seven versions of *Estorie;* all instances of the relevant pronouns were

Table 11.1 *Þ*-type and *h*-type pronouns in the versions of *Estorie*

MS	THEY		THEIR		THEM	
	þ-type	*h*-type	*þ*-type	*h*-type	*þ*-type	*h*-type
S (N. Wor., c.1400)	*þey* (50) *þei* (1)	*heo* (47) *he* (40) *e* (1) *a* (1) *ȝeo* (1)	–	*here* (42) *her* (6)	–	*hem* (84)
V (N. Wor., c.1390)	*þei* (2)	*heo* (18) *he* (1)	–	*heore* (9) *heor* (2) *her* (1)	–	*hem* (10)
B (Wor., 1410–1420)	*þei* (148)	*he* (2)	–	*her* (38)	–	*hem* (89)
P (Somerset, c.1350)	*þey* (3) *þay* (1) *þei* (1) *þe* (1)	*hii* (10)	*þar* (2)	*here* (4) *hire* (1) *hore* (1)	–	*hem* (9) *hom* (1)
D (S. Lincs., c.1300)	*þei* (15) *þe* (2)	–	*þer(e)* (6) *þeire* (5)	–	*þeim* (6) *þeym* (1) *þem* (1)	*hem* (2)
R (N. Lincs., early 15th cent.)	*þai* (40) *þei* (1)	*he* (1)	*þer* (8) *þare* (2)	*here* (1)	*þam* (33)	*hymselfe* (1)
L (Central East Midlands, 15th cent.)	*þey* (44) *they* (6) *þei* (4)	–	*þer* (1) *þere* (1) *there* (1)	*here* (6) *her* (5)	*þem* (8)	*hem* (36) *hemselue* (1)

identified and studied.[3] Throughout, we use *þ*-type to denote pronouns in both <þ> and <th>, and *h*-type to denote pronouns in <h> (including rare <a>, <e> and <ʒeo>).

The distribution of forms for THEY, THEIR, THEM across the seven manuscripts is, in the main, as expected on the basis of what we know about the textual history and origin of the manuscripts (see Sect. 2). The data are consistent with the general picture in the literature on the dialectal development of 3pl. forms: the replacement of *h*-type pronouns by the *þ*-type occurs first in the nominative, followed, more often than not, by the possessive and lastly the object forms (e.g. Morse-Gagné 2003: 134–138; Bergs 2005: 103).

The more northerly D and R, despite their significant age gap, share a near-categorical *þ*-type system across the whole paradigm. Until *LAEME*'s compilation, D was often attributed to North-West Norfolk because McIntosh (1987) identified a number of features commonly found in North Norfolk texts in D's copy of *Estorie.* However, its pronominal system is closer to that of the *Ormulum* (Johannesson 1995), an early Middle English text commonly attributed to South Lincolnshire (Laing 1978: 20–23; Parkes 1983), than to that of near-contemporary Norfolk manuscripts. In fact, Norfolk significantly lagged behind in the use of *þ*-type forms even by the end of the Middle English period (Morse-Gagné 2003: 149; Bergs 2005: Chapter 2; Cole Forthcoming). The Central East Midlands manuscript L has categorical *þ*-type subject forms but a mixed oblique paradigm, with *h*-type forms outnumbering *þ*-type forms (cf. Morse-Gagné 2003: 148–149).

In the Somerset text P, *h*-type forms predominate, but *þ*-type forms occur in the subject and even the possessive. The pronouns in *Estorie* are in keeping with the set of forms that Foster (1914: 25) cites for the whole manuscript: THEY *thai*, *þey*, *þei*, *þe*, *hii*, *hy*; THEIR *here*, *hire*, *hore*; THEM *þem*, *hem* (cf. *eLALME* LP 5220, which, for the *Northern Passion* text,

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[3] Some versions of *Estorie* have 3pl. pronouns where other versions have 3sg. pronouns in corresponding lines. As a result, the ambiguous form *he* occasionally posed problems of interpretation. Based on verbal inflexion and / or contextual clues, *he* at l. 410V, ll. 1828B, 2310B, l. 2178R was tagged as plural; *he* at ll. 1579B, 1581B and l. 397SVB was considered 3sg.; and *he* at l. 2251R, which involved a referent that could be singular or plural (*ilke a man* 'each man'), was excluded. We follow *LAEME* in considering *here* at l. 418D a fem. sg. possessive (cf. Millward 1998: 68, who considers it a 3pl. possessive).

records THEY *hii*, *hy*, *þey*; THEIR *hire*, *hore*, *here*, *þar*; THEM *hem*, *hom*, *þem*). As a whole, the language of P's *Estorie* can be said to represent a Mischsprache (see Sect. 2), but the extent to which its pronominal forms should be analysed as an example of dialect mixing is less obvious. The distribution of *h*-type and *þ*-type subject forms is consistent with usage found in V and S, and early South-West and West Midlands Middle English (see below), and is suggestive of variation within the confines of the scribe's own (passive) repertoire. However, the occurrence of posses-sive *þar* appears to be indicative of dialect mixing.[4]

The Worcestershire texts V, S and B have categorical *h*-type oblique forms but subject forms that range from the (near-)categorical *þ*-type in B to near-categorical *h*-type in V and a mix of variants in S. The exemplar ultimately shared by V, S and B is likely to have been an early Middle English Worcestershire rewriting of a northerly copy; it probably had *h*-type pronouns predominately for THEY, but also low-frequency *þ*-type forms, and only *h*-type pronouns for THEIR and THEM. While the pre-dominance of subject *þ*-type forms in B can be easily explained as one of the outcomes of its consistent modernising, V and S reflect the mixed paradigm of the exemplar more closely.[5] The distribution that we suggest for the exemplar is supported by the pronominal forms shared by V and S in the section where they overlap up to l. 574. Subject *h*-type forms are almost categorical, except at l. 45, where both S and V have a *þ*-type form. The line is virtually identical across V, S and B, which also suggests that the *þ*-type pronoun was in the exemplar.

eLALME's profile for V's Scribe B, viz. LP 7630, records a mixed para-digm for the subject, with a predominance of *þ*-type forms (together with some examples of *heo* and *a*), and *h*-type forms for the object and the possessive. Close examination shows some variation across the sampled texts: e.g. *þ*-type forms are categorical in the legends of St Bernard and St Paula, while the dialogue *Ypotis* includes thirteen *þ*-type forms and three *h*-type forms (Horstmann 1878: 3–8 and 41–61, and 1881: 341–348).

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[4] There is only one instance of a *þ*-type form for THEIR recorded in the South-West and West Midlands in early Middle English: *þaire* in *LAEME* text tr323ct.tag, Central Herefordshire, 1250–1275 (see Cole Forthcoming).

[5] In l. 1605B modernisation has been taken one step too far: B seems to have replaced an original *h*-form (cf. *he* in S) with *þei* even though the pronoun was 3sg., referring to Christ.

However, not all the texts that he copied have this general profile: in his version of *Ancrene Riwle* (Zettersten and Diensberg 2000) and the texts from the *South English Legendary h*-type forms are near-categorical in the subject (see e.g. Morris 1871: 18–61; cf. Görlach 1974: 102–103). This suggests that this scribe was happy to retain *h*-type forms fairly consistently (but see below).

The pronominal distribution posited for an early Middle English Worcestershire copy is in line with that found in West and South-West Midlands texts from the period 1150–1325. A quantitative study of 3pl. subject pronoun systems in this area based on *LAEME* (Cole Forthcoming) suggests that *þ*-type pronouns already occurred as a low-frequency variant for THEY. Even though *þ*-type forms are not recorded in Worcestershire in early Middle English, the North-East Gloucestershire text *LAEME* iacobt.tag and the North-West Gloucestershire text *LAEME* digby86mapt.tag have five cases of *þ*-type forms each (vs. 63 and 135 instances of *h*-forms, respectively). Similarly, *þa* occurs in *LAEME* tr323ct (Herefordshire); *þai* in *LAEME* layamonBOt.tag (North-West Wiltshire); and *þei* in *LAEME* laud108at.tag (Oxfordshire).

The *þ*-type subject pronouns in early Middle English West and South-West Midlands texts can arguably be traced back to *þæge* and *þage*, late West Saxon variant forms of the Old English demonstrative *þā*. These variants are found in various late West Saxon texts fulfilling the same independent and dependent functions as OE *þā*, including that of plural determiner, antecedent to a relative clause and personal pronoun. Thus, *þæge* and *þage* have been argued to be the source of *þai(e)*, a very low-frequency form found for THOSE (PRONOUN), THE and THEY in the text of Laȝamon's *Brut* recorded in the thirteenth-century manuscript London, British Library, MS Cotton Otho C XIII (*LAEME* layamonBOt.tag). *Þai* is also recorded for THE in the other manuscript of Laȝamon's *Brut*, viz. London, British Library, MS Cotton Caligula A IX, from near-contemporary Worcestershire (Morse-Gagné 2003: 231). The phonological and morphosyntactic evidence thus supports a native origin for early Middle English (South-)West *þai(e)* (cf. Förster 1941, 1942; Dance 2003: 456–457; Morse-Gagné 2003: 217–219, 231; Pons-Sanz 2013: 397–398; Cole 2018: 189–191). The West Midlands *þey-here-hem* system in late Middle English can therefore ultimately be traced back to

usage in late West Saxon and early Middle English, although the use of
þ-forms for the subject and the rest of the paradigm is also likely to have
been boosted by þ-forms from the North and East following interdialec-
tal contact.

Establishing the existence of low-frequency þ-type forms for THEY, but
not for THEIR and THEM in early Middle English in the South-West
Midlands allows us to explain why an early Middle English Worcestershire
scribe working on the ultimate exemplar of V, S and B would have cate-
gorically replaced oblique þ-type forms with h-type forms, and would
have replaced most—but not all—of the þ-type subject forms with h-type
forms. Thus, we propose that the scribal practice in the exemplar, and by
extension in S and V, represents a single coherent system and an example
of 'constrained' scribal response to an exemplar. The same can be argued
for the use of þ-type subject forms in P (see Sect. 2).

In their overlapping section, S and V only differ at l. 51, where S has
he and V *þei*. It is impossible to identify the source of the disparity.
However, it is likely that V's pronoun represents a later substitution, on
the one hand, because this scribe appears to have been more willing to
alter and adapt his texts in terms of both content and linguistic features
than the S scribe (cf. Doyle 1990: 9–10; Turville-Petre 1990; and Smith
2013, 2020: 85–88); and, on the other, because the subject þ-type forms,
and not the h-type forms, are likely to have been dominant in the active
repertoires of the V and S scribes. This is suggested by the preference for
þ-type subject pronouns in late medieval Worcestershire and London
(Morse-Gagné 2003: 147–148). The general distribution of dialectal
usage is more helpful in establishing scribal preferences in this case than
a comparison with the other texts that they copied. With regard to V, the
dominance of þ-type subject forms in *eLALME* LP 7630 is generally rep-
licated in texts that were not sampled by *eLALME*'s compilers: e.g.
Handlyng Synne (Sullens 1983: 247–269 and 365–370), Richard Rolle's
Ego Dormio (Ogilvie-Thomson 1988: 26–33 and 135–149) and the
A-text of *Piers Plowman* (Skeat 1867: Text A). However, as noted above,
the scribe also retains h-type subject forms in several texts. As long as the
variants form part of his active or passive linguistic repertoires, he is
happy to reproduce them.

As far as S is concerned, *eLALME* LP 7780, the profile for the C-text of *Piers Plowman*, has a categorical *þey-here-hem* system. The scribe is said to have copied his texts *literatim*, although the extent to which this is true for his pronominal usage is unclear on the basis of the pronominal distribution in *Estorie*. The number of *þ*-type subject forms in S increases significantly as the text progresses: in ll. 1–987, *h*-type forms occur forty-six times and *þ*-type forms just six times, while in the second half (ll. 988–1974) the different pronoun types have a near-identical quantitative distribution, appearing forty-four and forty-five times, respectively. We take the increasing number of *þ*-type forms as an indication that the text was penned by someone for whom subject *þ*-type forms had become more common than for the author of the early Middle English Worcester exemplar; as the later scribe progressed in the copying process, more *þ*-forms slipped in (cf. Benskin and Laing 1981: 66). Given that we no longer have V for comparison, it is impossible to know whether the substitutions should be associated with the author of the exemplar shared by S and V, or the S scribe; the latter would force us to reconsider to what extent he can be identified as a *literatim* scribe. Linguistic and stylistic conditioning also appears to play a role in explaining the increased use of *þ*-type subject pronouns, as we will argue in the following section.

3.2   Accounting for Intratextual Variation

Since certain versions of *Estoire* offer interesting variation in some forms of the 3pl. personal pronoun paradigm, this section explores whether, in addition to the existence of different layers of scribal intervention with concomitant dialectal variation, linguistic and stylistic factors can also help account for such variation. Based on the findings of previous literature, we carried out an analysis of several linguistic factors that could influence the choice of pronoun variant; our five foci are presented in the subsections below. Given the low counts and / or near categorical distribution of variants in certain environments (see Table 11.1), we restricted our analysis of transient pronominal systems to THEY variants in S and P, and THEM variants in L. There are only three *þ*-type THEIR forms in L and two in P, and only two *h*-type THEM forms in D: too few to include in a quantitative variationist analysis, but we refer to these forms in our

discussion where relevant. The analysis of S is based on the second half (ll. 988–1974), where *h*-type and *þ*-type pronouns occur in almost equal measure.

Syntactic Context

To understand the syntactic behaviour of *h*- and *þ*-type subject pronouns during the Middle English period, it is helpful to consider some of the factors that have been put forward to explain the use of Old English demonstrative pronouns as personal pronouns (Cole 2018). As noted in Sect. 3.1, *þ*-type pronouns are likely to be the result of polygenesis, with reflexes of Old English demonstratives in personal pronoun use in the West and South-West Midlands being reinforced by *þ*-type pronouns spreading from the North and East Midlands via dialect contact, themselves of multiple origins (see Cole 2018, Forthcoming). Thus, the use of *þ*-type pronouns probably reflects some continuation of the patterns characteristic of the native demonstrative pronouns, as well as the association of the native and Norse-derived paradigms because of their formal similarity.

The use of demonstrative pronouns in Old English broadly conforms to accessibility hierarchies for pronominal material (Ariel 2001; Los and Kemenade 2018), whereby pronoun use is determined by the saliency of the antecedent in terms of retrieval and accessibility of meaning. Anaphoric expressions like personal pronouns have reduced referentiality, so they typically pick up salient antecedents like the topic in a previous stretch of discourse. Newly introduced referents are less salient, and thus less accessible; they favour demonstrative anaphoric expressions that have a stronger reference and phonetic form than personal pronouns. Stressed personal pronouns fall somewhere between (Ariel 2001: 31; see the discussion of phonological factors below). Clause initial demonstratives in Old English therefore generally refer to less accessible referents. Typically, they involve the second mention of a newly introduced protagonist and develop the narrative further (Los and Kemenade 2018: 138). This could explain why both S and V use the *þ*-type pronoun at l. 45 (see Sect. 3.1). The clause-initial pronoun *þey* picks up the newly introduced referent

wise men and develops the narrative's description of their customs (see further the discussion on reference below):

> Wise men in olde dawis
> Bokis made of gode lawis
> How me sholde hem with riȝt leden
> & wyse to ben in alle here deden
> But þey noþynge ne wiste of þe. (ll. 41–45S)

> 'Wise men in old days / Books made of good law / How men should themselves with righteousness lead / and be wise in all their deeds / But they nothing knew of you'.

Clause initial position is closely linked to line initial and thematic positions. Not surprisingly in this respect, in a study of the distribution of *þ*-type and *h*-type pronouns in the mid-fourteenth-century London / Middlesex variety of Hand I in the Auchinleck MS, Smith (2001: 232–233) finds that line-initial position favours *þ*-type pronouns, whereas *h*-type pronouns are rare there, and appear most frequently after subordinating conjunctions and topicalised adverbial phrases. He argues that this reflects the vestiges of a system where *þ*-type pronouns were originally used in thematic position but 'where *h*-types were an option in non-thematic positions' (Smith 2001: 233).

In keeping with these arguments, we tagged THEY variants in S and P depending on whether they occurred in main or subordinate clauses. We also coded THEY variants in S and P for syntactic context depending on whether the subject pronoun appeared: (i) in clause-initial position;[6] (ii) following a topicalised element (object or adverbial), e.g. *To helle he wende withouten strif* (l. 190S: 'to hell they went without strife'); (iii) in non-clause initial position either involving inversion, e.g. *ne hedden heo* (l. 194S: 'they had not'), or following a subordinating conjunction or relative pronoun, e.g. *Þe child þat heo abyde longe* (l. 330S: 'the child that they had long waited for'); (iv) as an antecedent to a restrictive relative clause,

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[6] We follow the literature in considering personal pronouns after the conjunctions *but* / *and* clause initial (cf. Los and van Kemenade 2018). We also coded subject pronouns modified by *al(le)*, e.g. *alle heo comen* (l. 410S: 'they all came'), as clause initial because *alle* is part of the subject.

Table 11.2 MS S, ll. 988–1974 (THEY): Clause type

	h-type	*þ*-type	Total
Main	29	29	58
Subordinate	15	16	31
Total	44	45	89

Table 11.3 MS S, ll. 988–1974 (THEY): Syntactic context

	h-type	*þ*-type	Total
Cl.int.	5	5	10
Top.obj. / adv.	17	18	35
Non-cl.int.	20	19	39
Ant.rel.	2	3	5
Total	44	45	89

e.g. *he þat byforen & aftur ȝede* (l. 1068S: 'they that went before and after'), as this was a typical environment for the use of a demonstrative pronoun in Old English.

The results indicate that the different pronoun variants in S are similarly distributed across main and subordinate clauses (Table 11.2). The figures for syntactic context in S do not point in any particular direction either. In the second part of S, where the rates of *h*-type and *þ*-type subject forms are almost identical, the distribution of pronoun variants across the different syntactic contexts is remarkably similar (Table 11.3). In P, five out of six *þ*-type subject tokens appear in main clauses and four of these tokens occur in clause initial position or as an antecedent to a relative clause, typical demonstrative pronoun contexts in Old English, although the dataset is too small to be conclusive in any way. *H*-type subject pronouns occur just once in clause initial position, a tendency in line with Smith's (2001) findings (Tables 11.4 and 11.5). The only *þ*-type forms for THEIR in P also occur in initial position.

Regarding variants for THEM and their syntactic function, Bergs (2005) finds that *hem* is favoured as a direct-object pronoun in the fifteenth-century Norfolk Paston Letters, and most individual speakers demonstrate a 'slight in some cases, but still noticeable' tendency to use *them* more as a prepositional object and *hem* as a simple object (Bergs 2005: 115–116). A similar trend is found in late Old Northumbrian, whereby

Table 11.4   MS P (THEY): Clause type

	h-type	*þ*-type	Total
Main	8	5	13
Subordinate	2	1	3
Total	10	6	16

Table 11.5   MS P (THEY): Syntactic context

	h-type	*þ*-type	Total
Ant.rel.	–	2	2
Cl.int.	1	2	3
Non-cl.int.	3	–	3
Top.obj. / adv.	6	2	8
Total	10	6	16

Table 11.6   MS L (THEM): Syntactic role

	h-type	*þ*-type	Total
DO	8	–	8
IO	11	3	14
PO	18	5	23
Total	37	8	45

prepositions favour *þ*-type (demonstrative) pronoun objects over *h*-type pronouns (Cole 2018: 183–184). However, no such effect is found in the *Ormulum*; the *LAEME* sample of the text has eleven prepositional object contexts, where *hemm* occurs six times, *hemmsellfenn* four times and *þeʒʒm* once.

In L, the only text with a reasonable degree of object pronoun variation, variants for THEM were coded for the following syntactic functions: (i) direct object (DO); (ii) indirect object (IO); (iii) prepositional object (PO). The results are striking in that, similarly to Bergs's findings, *þ*-type forms occur as indirect objects and prepositional objects, but not in direct object function (Table 11.6). Only *h*-type pronouns function as direct objects. Contrastively, the instances of *hem* in D are restricted to the only prepositional contexts in the text (ll. 68D, 240D), but this also suggests a syntactic constraint that differentiates prepositional objects from other object types using different surface morphology.

Bergs (2005: 116) suggests that the tendency for prepositional objects to involve *them* rather than *hem* in the Paston Letters could be the result of psycholinguistic principles but takes the suggestion no further. The use of periphrastic structures instead of monomorphemic forms has been argued to be motivated by a speaker's desire to talk in a way that gets them noticed (Haspelmath 1999: 1057). Periphrastic structures, such as prepositional phrases, are more expressive and transparent than opaque or reduced constructions (Lehmann 2015: 4). In a Middle English pronoun system involving competing variants, a periphrastic prepositional structure might initially have favoured the phonetically more salient pronoun object. In a system where *h*-type forms had become rare, however, as in the Lincolnshire dialect of D, the contrast between PO and DO could be maintained and reinforced by using *h*-type forms in PO contexts.

Referent

In considering whether the anaphoric pronominal form is determined by the nature of the referent, a starting point is Bergs's (2005) study of animacy and gender as possible influences in the Paston Letters. We were not able to investigate animacy because the 3pl. pronouns in *Estorie* refer categorically to animate referents, but subject pronouns in S and P were coded for gender of the referent as follows: MALE for male-only groups with explicit male referents (e.g. *men*, *kings*, *princes*, *knights*, *shepherds*, etc.); FEMALE for female-only groups with explicit female referents (e.g. *Mary Magdalene [and] sweet Mary*, *women*, etc.); MIXED for groups explicitly comprising both men and women (e.g. *Zachariah and Elizabeth*); NEUTER for neuter groups (e.g. referents such as *folk*, *friends*, *Jews*, *the meek*); and IMPERSONAL for contexts in which 3pl. pronouns are used impersonally with an implied but not stated antecedent: e.g. *Þo leyden heo on Ihesu honde* (l. 1186S: 'then they laid hands on Jesus'), where *þey* implies the soldiers but the referent is not explicit in the narrative. There is also a small INDEFINITE group of the type *þey þat put loue bytwene…* (l. 1008P: 'they that put love between…'), where the 3pl. pronoun is the antecedent to a restrictive relative clause.

Table 11.7   MS S, ll. 988–1974 (THEY): Referent

	h-type	*þ*-type	Total
MALE	12	5	17
FEMALE	2	4	6
MIXED	–	1	1
NEUTER	11	5	16
IMPERSONAL	17	27	44
INDEFINITE	2	3	5
Total	44	45	89

Table 11.8   MS P (THEY): Referent

	h-type	*þ*-type	Total
MALE	10	2	12
NEUTER	–	2	2
INDEFINITE	–	2	2
Total	10	6	16

The results for S indicate that *h*-type pronouns clearly prefer MALE referents (70.5%, *N* = 12/17) and NEUTER referents (68.7%, *N* = 11/16; Table 11.7). Similarly, in P, *h*-type anaphoric pronouns are only used to refer to MALE referents (Table 11.8). However, *þ*-type forms are the favoured IMPERSONAL pronoun in S (61%, *N* = 27/44; Table 11.7). Notably, all bar one of the IMPERSONAL contexts in S occur during the second half, which might help explain the far higher rate of *þ*-type pronouns in this later section. Ariel (2001: 31–33) notes that, in addition to the inherent salience of an antecedent, the accessibility of an antecedent is also determined by clear cohesion and unity between the antecedent and its anaphor. The looser the unity between the antecedent and its anaphor, the lower the accessibility of the relevant mental representation. Thus, the preference in S for IMPERSONAL *þ*-type pronouns is fully in keeping with the accessibility hierarchy discussed above. Shared origin or formal similarity with the demonstrative pronoun can also account for the fact that *þ*-type pronouns occur in five out of the seven INDEFINITE contexts across S and P.

Tokens for THEM in L were also tagged for gender of referent; *h*-types predominate in all contexts, but this is expected given the relatively low occurrence of *þ*-type pronouns (Table 11.9).

Table 11.9 MS L (THEM): Referent

	h-type	*þ*-type	Total
MALE	18	5	23
FEMALE	2	1	3
NEUTER	8	–	8
IMPERSONAL	9	2	11
Total	37	8	45

Phonological Factors

Segmental phonotactic factors have been shown to condition pronominal variation. Johannesson ([1995](#)) demonstrates that, in the *Ormulum,* only *þeȝȝre* can be used after words ending in vowels or /j/, and *þeȝȝre* is also favoured if the final segment of the preceding word is /l/. The phonological conditioning of *þeȝȝre* and *heore* maximises the sonority contrast across word boundaries and avoids vowel hiatus. Hiatus avoidance also determines the distribution of *þeȝȝm* and *hemm*: only *þeȝȝm* can occur after words with a non-elidable final vowel (e.g. *þatt he þeȝȝm*), whereas *hemm* appears after word-final consonants. The findings highlight the importance of perceptual salience in determining the appearance of *þ*-type pronouns instead of *h*-type pronouns and are consistent with arguments that have stressed the role of phonological prominence in explaining the spread of the *þ*-type (see below). Having said that, Bergs ([2005](#): 124) finds that usage in the Paston Letters shows no strong link between pronoun variation and preceding segment. He suggests that, as the replacement process advanced, the phonological motivations for adopting *þ*-type forms (clear perception, creation of prominent onsets) may have become less important than other factors, such as paradigmatic (analogical) pressure (Bergs [2005](#): 125–126).

To test for the possible effect of segmental phonotactics in our data, THEY variants in S and P and THEM variants in L were tagged for preceding and following phonological context.[7] Preceding environments in S

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[7] Coding for preceding segment involved the challenge of deciding whether final (elidable) *-e* was pronounced or not. As a general guideline, we assumed that, as in syllabic verse, final *-e* is elided when a vowel, /h/, or /w/ follows. For the purposes of coding, we assumed that initial <h-> and final <-n> were pronounced. Millward ([1998](#): 75–76) notes that <-n> endings in S occur at a higher rate in non-rhyme position than in rhyme, which suggests that final <-n> was not being used simply to preserve rhymes.

Table 11.10   MS S, ll. 988–1974 (THEY): Phonological environment

	Preceding segment			Following segment		
	h-type	*þ*-type	Total	*h*-type	*þ*-type	Total
/b/	–	–	–	4	4	8
/d/	8	4	12	1	2	3
/ð/	1	–	1	3	1	4
/f/	–	1	1	–	2	2
/g/	–	–	–	–	2	2
/h/	–	1	1	4	5	9
/j/, /dʒ/	–	–	–	4	1	5
/k/	–	1	1	1	3	4
/l/	3	5	8	1	3	4
/m/	2	5	7	1	5	6
/n/	9	6	15	6	2	8
/p/	–	1	1	–	–	–
Pause	2	1	3	–	–	–
/r/	3	3	6	–	–	–
/s/	5	3	8	3	4	7
/ʃ/	–	–	–	2	5	7
/t/	8	8	16	3	–	3
Vowel	3	6	9	5	1	6
/w/	–	–	–	6	5	11
Total	44	45	89	44	45	89

involving /l/ or a vowel tend to favour *þ*-type subject pronouns dispro-
portionally; this effect is particularly notable in the latter section of S at
$N = 5/8$ and $N = 6/9$, respectively. Following environments involving
vowels, however, favour *h*-type subject pronouns (Table 11.10). In L,
þ-type pronouns for THEM only occur after /d, t, ð/ and vowels, and they
favour following segments in /ð/ or sonorous segments like vowels, /j/ or
/l/ (Table 11.12), leading to strings like *with þem þey* (l. 1918L), *to þem
þe* (l. 1951L), which appear to reflect a preference for dental consonance.
Four out of six *þ*-type THEY pronouns in P are also preceded by segments
in /d, t/ and two out of the six are followed by /ð/ (Table 11.11). However,
as the pronoun appears in sequences like *and þey* and *þey þat* (twice each),
there could be an interaction here with the tendency for *þ*-type pronouns
in P to favour clause initial and antecedent to relative clause contexts (cf.

Table 11.11 MS P (THEY): Phonological environment

	Preceding segment			Following segment		
	h-type	*þ*-type	Total	*h*-type	*þ*-type	Total
/b/	–	–	–	–	1	1
/d/	2	3	5	2	–	2
/ð/	–	–	–	1	2	3
/f/	–	–	–	–	1	1
/j/	–	–	–	1	–	1
/l/	–	–	–	1	1	2
/m/	1	–	1	1	1	2
/n/	–	–	–	2	–	2
Pause	1	2	3	–	–	–
/r/	1	–	1	–	–	–
/s/	–	–	–	1	–	1
/t/	2	1	3	–	–	–
Vowel	3	–	3	1	–	1
Total	10	6	16	10	6	16

Table 11.12 MS L (THEM): Phonological environment

	Preceding segment			Following segment		
	h-type	*þ*-type	Total	*h*-type	*þ*-type	Total
/b/	5	1	6	4	–	4
/θ/, /ð/	1	2	3	8	3	11
/f/	4	–	4	–	–	–
/h/	–	–	–	4	–	4
/j/	–	–	–	–	1	1
/k/	–	–	–	1	1	2
/l/	3	–	3	1	1	2
/m/	–	–	–	1	–	1
/n/	3	–	3	1	–	1
Pause	3	–	3	–	–	–
/r/	3	–	3	–	–	–
/s/	3	–	3	6	1	7
/t/	2	2	4	4	–	4
Vowel	10	3	13	3	1	4
/w/	–	–	–	4	–	4
Total	37	8	45	37	8	45

the discussion on syntactic context and reference above). S, however, appears to avoid dental consonance; *h*-type pronouns are preferred after preceding environments involving /d, ð/ (*N* = 9/13) and following environments involving /d, t, ð/ (*N* = 7/10). Similar stylistic preferences

might also explain the disproportionately high rate of *þ*-type pronouns following segments in /m/ (*N* = 5/7). In all these contexts, *þey* is preceded by *him* (or *hem*), which suggests that *þey* is used to avoid the sequence *him heo.* Following environments involving /m/ also favour *þ*-type pronouns, but four out of the five cases involve the verb *mouen*, which suggests lexical conditioning (Table 11.10; cf. the discussion on verbal morphology and semantics below).

There is also good reason to believe that the development of pronoun systems interacts with suprasegmental features such as stress, as pronouns typically have a stressed form and an unstressed form. In this respect, the emphatic function of demonstrative pronouns fits the suggestion that *þ*-type pronouns were first used in stressed positions. After all, they had a stronger onset and offered greater phonological prominence (Samuels 1972: 71; Ritt 2001; Bergs 2005: 94–95 and 122). Recovering the stress and intonation patterns of historical written data, however, is extremely problematic. *Estorie* was written as four-stress accentual verse rather than syllabic verse, and each line has an indeterminate number of unstressed syllables (Millward 1998: 80–81). Later substitutions might also have disrupted the original stress patterns. All of this makes the classification of stress in such data too impressionistic to be entirely reliable; we therefore decided not to code for stress. Rhyme has also been shown to have an effect on the distribution of *þ*-type and *h*-type forms (Smith 2001: 229–230), but 3pl. pronouns do not occur in rhyming position in *Estorie.*

Verbal Inflection and Semantics

The demise of *h*-type pronouns in favour of *þ*-type pronouns has often been argued to involve an example of therapeutic change that 'fixed' ambiguities in the language. Middle English pronoun paradigms often had identical 3sg. and 3pl. *h*-type personal pronouns. S's *Estorie* is a case in point; *he* occurs for HE, SHE and THEY, and *heo* for SHE and THEY. This lack of a third-person singular-plural pronoun distinction, together with the loss of distinctive singular-plural verbal morphology, created a situation in which *þ*-type pronouns had the potential advantage of disambiguating a pronoun system with opaque number distinctions (Samuels 1972;

Thomason and Kaufman 1988: 324; Howe 1996; Lass 1999: 160–166). However, the association of *þ*-type forms with disambiguation is problematic: the *Ormulum*, the earliest Middle English text with consistent use of *þ*-type pronouns, employs *þeʒʒ* categorically and yet retains distinctive singular-plural verbal morphology. Smith (2001: 231) also finds no link between the distribution of *h*- and *þ*-type forms and the loss of verbal inflection; when *h*-type pronouns follow a verb in his data, final -*n* is required in order to avoid elision (e.g. w*enten he*) but not as a disambiguating strategy (Smith 2001: 231).

We tested a possible link between pronoun type and number marking on the verb by tagging pronouns for the number morphology of the verb that they co-occurred with.[8] As in other studies, no correlation was found between the loss of distinctive verbal number morphology and the use of *þ*-type subject pronouns. If replacement were therapeutic, higher rates of *þ*-type subject pronouns would occur with verbs unmarked for number, yet the distribution of *þ*-type and *h*-type pronouns with numberless verbs is almost identical in S (Table 11.13). Interestingly, the only example of a distinctive plural verbal form in P occurs with a *þ*-type pronoun (Table 11.14).

Table 11.13   MS S, ll. 988–1974 (THEY): Number morphology

	h-type	*þ*-type	Total
+ pl	20	20	40
– pl	24	25	49
Total	44	45	89

Table 11.14   MS P (THEY): Number morphology

	h-type	*þ*-type	Total
+ pl	–	1	1
– pl	10	5	15
Total	10	6	16

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[8] The loss of -*en* neutralises the number distinction in weak preterites. However, ablaut contrasts in the stem continued to distinguish number in some strong verbs regardless of the loss of final -*en*: e.g. *bēde* < ME *bēden* < OE *bǣdon* is distinctly plural, as opposed to *bad* (< OE *bæd*), which occurs in both singular and plural contexts; cf. also plural (*by)gunne* versus singular *bigan / bigon*, and plural *abyde* < ME *abiden*.

Table 11.15   MS S, ll. 988–1974 (THEY): Lexical conditioning

h-type	þ-type	Both		
		Stative / aux. / intrans.		
			h-type	þ-type
Stative / intransitive: *stōnden*, *understōnden* (1); *biginnen*, *gōn* (2); *witen* (3)	Stative / intransitive: *faren*, *ginnen*, *hēren* (1); *sēn* (2); *comen*, *willen* (3)	*bēn* (aux.)	1	1
		bēn (lex.)	5	4
		hāven (aux.)	1	3
Other: *bēren*, *brēken*, *casten*, *clēpen*, *mēten*, *nimen*, *setten*, *stingen*, *swinken* (1); *leien*, *tāken* (2)	Other: *bīnden*, *drauen*, *graunten*, *liften*, *māken*, *shāken*, *sprēden* (1); *lēden*, *seien* (2)	*hāven* (lex.)	2	1
		mouen	2	5
		shulen	2	4
		wenden	2	1
		Other:		
		bidden	2	1
		bringen	3	1
		dōn	1	1
		finden	1	1

Table 11.16   MS P (THEY): Lexical conditioning

h-type	þ-type
Stative and intransitive: *gōn*, *shulen*, *understōnden* (1); *hāven* (lex.) (2)	Stative, auxiliary and intransitive: *fallen*, *lēven*, *mouen* (1); *bēn* (lex.) (2)
Other: *lēten*, *māken*, *tellen* (1); *dōn* (2)	Other: *putten* (1)

Unlike morphology, verbal semantics does, however, appear to be an influencing factor, but once again the low numbers make the findings rather impressionistic. Þ-type subject pronouns in S seem to favour stative, auxiliary and intransitive verbs disproportionately: þ-type variants occur with these verb types at a rate of 67% ($N = 30/45$) compared with h-type pronouns at 50% ($N = 22/44$) (Table 11.15). Similarly, five out of six þ-type subject pronouns in P co-occur with these types of verbs (Table 11.16). These observations are in line with early Middle English pronominal systems in Oxfordshire, Ely, West Suffolk and Gloucestershire with low-frequency þ-type subjects; þ-type tokens occur more frequently with stative, auxiliary and intransitive verbs (see Cole Forthcoming).

Stylistic Factors

A qualitative analysis indicates that other stylistic factors may also determine pronominal choice. Scribes appear to use *h*-type and *þ*-type variants to create a stylistic effect when referring to the same referent twice within the line and / or across the sentence, as illustrated in (1–4). At times, the scribe avails himself of the different pronoun variants to avoid repetition, as in (2), in much the same way that he uses other synonyms (cf. *wende* and *come*):

(1) Þo **he** wiste **þey** weren nye (l. 658S: 'Then they knew they were near')

(2) Al **heo** aȝeyns hym wende / Aȝeyn him **þey** come al bydeene… (ll. 1061–1062S: 'And they to him went / To him they came all, offering…')

(3) And þey left **here bot** anon / **Þar nettus** walweþ þat ssolde hem fede (ll. 965–966P: 'And they left their boat immediately / They rolled their nets that should feed them')

(4) þat Ihesus byfore **to hem** seide / **To þem** þe whiles þat he was alyue (ll. 1950–1951L: 'That Jesus said to them before / To them the time that he was alive').

Scribes also seem to have avoided the stylistically awkward sequence *þey þey* 'though they' (cf. Samuels 1972: 71–72; Smith 2001: 228).

4   Conclusion

This paper has taken a new approach to the history of 3pl. pronominal forms by triangulating data associated with various aspects of the distribution of these forms in the seven manuscripts that record the early Middle English text *La estorie del evangelie*. We have combined (i) the in-depth analysis of the seven versions of *Estorie* with (ii) scribal behaviour across various texts, and (iii) a diatopic and diachronic overview of pronominal usage in Middle English made possible by bringing *eLALME*

and *LAEME* data together. This has produced a new understanding of the etymology of 3pl. *þ*-type pronominal forms and their textual use in our corpus and beyond. The existence of the near contemporary Norse-derived *þe33*- forms in the *Ormulum* and the native *þai*(*e*) in (South-)West Midlands texts, and the patterning of *þ*-type forms in our texts argue in favour of polygenesis, as opposed to the traditional etymological explanation based on language contact at the expense of native derivation.

Even though the number of tokens is relatively low and therefore we can only talk about trends rather than statistically significant results, it is notable that *þ*-type forms in our corpus tend to dominate in contexts where Old English demonstrative pronouns were commonly used as personal pronouns. *Þ*-type variants do not show the same clear preference for clause initial position found in Smith's ([2001](#)) fourteenth-century London data, except in the case of P, but there is a strong tendency for *þ*-type pronouns to function as anaphors for referents that lack saliency and as antecedents of relative pronouns.

The phonological salience of the *þ*-type forms also seems to have contributed to their use in particular phonological environments and in marked syntactic structures, such as prepositional phrases, as opposed to monomorphemic constructions. Moreover, our analysis has shown that, while the avoidance of pronominal or verbal ambiguity cannot easily explain the use of *þ*-type forms, lexical conditioning and stylistic factors might play a role in pronominal choice. The impact of these factors can also be seen beyond our corpus, but this is an area which still requires further analysis (cf. Sect. [3.2](#)).

There is, however, some variation within these trends. For instance, the syntactic behaviour of *þ*-type subject forms in S differs from that in P, possibly as a result of the interaction between syntax and stylistics: e.g. the two texts appear to exhibit different preferences when it comes to dental consonance. The tendency for S to avoid dental consonance might explain why there aren't more clause-initial strings in S of the type *but þey… / and þey…* Other differences might be attributable to the make-up of the pronominal profile in a particular dialectal area; this is exemplified by the choice of *h*-type as opposed to *þ*-type forms as a prepositional object in D, which differs from most other manuscripts in our corpus in having near-categorical *þ*-type forms across the whole paradigm. The

shared trends and the differences between the various versions demonstrate that both general overviews (cf. Morse-Gagné 2003) and the nuanced analysis of intratextual variation are fundamental to understanding how and why *þ*-type pronominal forms replaced *h*-type forms.

This work also has implications beyond the confines of personal pronouns. On the one hand, the analysis of intrascribal variation in Sect. 3.1 points to the need for a significant reconsideration of scribal behaviour. The scribe responsible for writing *Estorie* in S is said to have copied his texts *literatim*, but the distribution of *þ*-type subject forms across this version of the text raises the intriguing possibility that he might have had more input into his texts that he is given credit for. Indeed, his behaviour does not seem to have been very different from that of V's Scribe B, who is generally presented as a moderniser who imposed some dialectal regularity in the texts that he copied. Furthermore, the multifaceted approach used here could be applied to other texts for which there are multiple manuscripts, and doing so could shed light on other linguistic features, both grammatical and lexical.

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