Phrasal and Compound Verbs in Early North Germanic

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Abstract

One of the characteristic features of Old Norse is the loss of unstressed preverbs and hence a great reduction in the number of compound verbs inherited from Proto-Germanic. Yet interpretations that assume the existence of verb-particle constructions are often invoked by runologists suggesting the development of a new type of verbal formation in early North Germanic. The appearance of both phrasal and compound verbs in early runic inscriptions may represent evidence of a language where both object-verb and verb-object phenomena were common. This paper reassesses the early runic evidence for phrasal and compound verbs, particularly in light of a 1999 find from the Nydam bog and recent syntactic scholarship.

Keywords: Early North Germanic, older futhark inscriptions, syntax, phrasal verbs, compound verbs, KJ 17a Eikeland clasp, Nydam spear-shaft runic inscription

Perhaps the most notable behaviour that distinguishes Old Norse and the later North Germanic languages from the other Germanic dialects is their common employment of phrasal verbs where German and Old Germanic languages such as Gothic typically preserve compound verbs. English has more clearly developed from a language that favoured compound verbs such as Old English *ætgifan* 'give to' to one where phrasal verbs such as *give to* now prevail, and it seems clear that the North Germanic languages must have undergone a similar development at an earlier linguistic stage than Old Norse. Both compound and phrasal verbs are often claimed to be attested in the early runic evidence from Scandinavia as if the change from dialects that favoured compound to phrasal verbs was occurring at the time that the early runic inscriptions are attested.

The widespread employment of compound verbs in Gothic, Old English and Old High German suggests that phrasal verbs must have been rare in Proto-Germanic and that the favouring of phrasal verbs in Old Norse is one of the most important early dialectal developments in North Germanic.

This paper assesses the evidence for phrasal and compound verbs among the early runic inscriptions in light of recent studies of historical syntax. After considering the broader evidence for compound and phrasal verbs in early runic epigraphy, two examples of texts are analysed: those that appear on the Eikeland clasp (KJ 17a) and on a spear-shaft from the Nydam bog (Rau and Nedoma 2014). Rather than a phrasal verb, the inscription on the Eikeland clasp appears merely to preserve a prepositional phrase, while the Nydam spear-shaft inscription seems to be best understood as featuring a compound verb. The Nydam inscription also appears to demonstrate that a relatively late date should be assumed for the preservation of weakly stressed preverbs in North Germanic and the preservation of compound verbs in the early runic inscriptions more generally.

Phrasal verbs

The Germanic languages feature two manners in which an adverb may be added to a main verb in order to create a new construction (Thim 2012). The older, inherited manner is to prefix an adverb to a main verb to form a compound. The Indo-European languages make wide use of compound verbs, with Hittite, Vedic Sanskrit, Ancient Greek and Old Irish being particularly characterised by their use of preverbs. Compound verbs are commonly attested in the Old Germanic languages other than Old Norse, with preverbs derived from Proto-Germanic adverbs such as *anda, *bi, *eni, *fra, *ga(n) and *uds (Kroonen 2011, 87) being particularly common. But compound verbs are rare (and often only controversially attested) in early runic inscriptions as if they had already been mostly lost to North Germanic at a very early date. By the time of the appearance of the earliest records of Old Norse, compound verbs had become remarkably rare, in marked contrast to other Germanic languages such as Gothic, Old English and Old High German. The separation of North Germanic from the West Germanic languages is often assumed to have only occurred at the time that the oldest runic inscriptions are first documented, however, suggesting that compound verbs should be present in the early runic record.

Compound verbs were evidently once commoner in North Germanic than they are in Old Norse as nominal compounds such as Old Norse *andswar* 'answer' and the corresponding verbal form *svara* 'answer'

(< *anda-swar-) seem to attest (although cf. the rarer formal verb *andsvara* 'answer, be responsible for'). Some compound verbs have been argued to appear in early runic inscriptions, but the evidence is remarkably slight and it has been contested. The Vimose wood-plane (KJ 25) features a sequence **an-:regu** that Seebold (1994, 66 f.) identifies as a preverb *ana-* and a first-person singular present form of what Markey (2012, 101–05) reconstructs as the problematically attested strong verb *rehaną/reganą* 'counsel, advise'. The Reistad inscription's **unnam** (KJ 74) has also long been thought to preserve an otherwise unattested compound of a preverb *und-* or *unþ-* (Seebold 2003, 300 f.) and what Marstrander (1930) argued was a third-person singular preterite form of *nemaną* 'take' (on the model of Old English *underniman* 'take surreptitiously, steal, take into the mind, understand'). Antonsen (1975, no. 41; 2002, 202 f.), however, took **unnam** to be a privative cognomen *Unnām[z]* of a type well-attested in North Germanic (Williams 1993) and there is some evidence that the surface of the Reistad stone has fragmented (and hence that some characters may have been lost) after **unnam** (Hansen 2020, 240; Mees 2021, 115–18). There have also been similar concerns regarding how best to interpret **an-:regu**, Grønvik (1996, 35) interpreting the sequence as a nominal compound 'the ones who are reeling', comparing Danish *rave* 'stagger, reel'. Many of the preverbs inherited by North Germanic were lost sometime during the Iron Age as part of a widespread deletion of unstressed prefixes (Schulte 2003a; 2003b; 2005), with most compound constructions in Old Norse evidently representing new formations.

The other kind of adverbial modification to a main verb attested in Germanic is found in verb-particle constructions. These are much commoner than compound verbs in the North Germanic languages and most evidently represent fairly recent formations. As Thim (2012) observes, phrasal verbs seem to reflect the emergence of verb-object word orders from an inherited Indo-European object-verb order, a development that is attested in the early runic texts (Eythórsson 2012). What has traditionally been taken as an unambiguous example of such a phrasal verb is attested in the early runic By inscription where the main verb *ortē* 'worked' was proposed by Krause (in Krause and Jankuhn 1966, 161) to be further specified by the particle *ūt* 'out'. Together the two forms have usually been recognised (after Krause) as constituting a phrasal verb *ortē … ūt* 'wrought', although the inscription becomes increasingly difficult to make out after the sequence *ortē*. The inscription on the memorial from By also seems to be syntactically deficient, following a first-person singular pronoun *ek* with a third-person singular verb *ortē*.

Dated to the c. AD 375/400–520/530 period by Imer (2015, 28), the monumental text on the By runestone was read by Krause (in Krause and Jankuhn 1966, 159) as:

e͡kirilazhrozazh͡rozezoṛteþatazinautalaif͡ṵdz | rmþï
ek irilaz Hrōzaz Hrōzez ortē þat azina ūt Ālaifu…
'I, Lord Hrozaz, son of Hrozaz, (he) wrought this slab for Alaifu.'

Imer (2015, 28), however, does not accept Krause's transcription **ut** (indicating that only the **t** is secure) and she reads **alai-d-** before the final sequence. The inscription begins with an onomastic formula featuring *irilaz*, a term cognate with Old Norse *jarl* that Olsen (in Olsen and Shetelig 1929, 58–60) translated as 'rune-master', but which from a syntactic perspective can only be a form of address comparable to Latin *dominus* 'lord'.[1] The final sequence **rmþï** is most recently taken by Kusmenko (2017) to preserve a magical code.

An even less clear case of a phrasal verb is assumed by Knirk (2015), following Krause (in Krause and Jankuhn 1966, 47), to appear on the sixth-century Eikeland clasp. In this instance the phrasal verb is assumed to be *wrītu ī* which Knirk translates as 'engrave' (cf. Imer 2015, 55). The adverbial reflections of the preposition *í* in Old Norse all preserve nasal enlargements and Knirk's interpretation of the Eikeland inscription suggests use of a preposition in the formation of a phrasal verb where we would expect to find an adverb. The allative adverbial equivalent of the Old Norse preposition *í* is *inn*, its locative is *inni* 'in(side)', its ablative is *innan* 'from inside, out', and a similar pattern is evidenced in the other Germanic languages (Faarlund 2004, 108; Kroonen 2011, 87–91). Old Norse constructions such as *kom inn í stofuna* 'entered into the room' (*Grettis saga* 65; Bragi Halldórsson et al. 1987, 1056) demonstrate the relevant difference – *inn* is the verbal particle, *í* a preposition. Employing the preposition *í* in a phrasal verb would be as unexpected as the appearance of the preposition *ór, or* (< **uz* < **uds*) rather than the allative adverb *[ū]t* (< **ud*) on the By memorial; compare the ablative adverb **inana** 'from inside' on the Hogganvik stone (Mees 2017, 11) and the locative adverb **ute** 'outside' on the Björketorp stone (KJ 97).

In Old Norse, however, the preposition *í* takes a dative when it is found in collocation with *rún* (e.g. *í rúnom* in *Hávamál*, st. 157; Kuhn 1983, 43)

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[1] Functional titles never precede names in Old Norse – only terms of address usually accord with the syntax attested in the By inscription; cf. *dom(i)n(us) Geilimer* to *Þóroddr rúnameistari* (Mees 2018).

presumably because to carve a text 'in runes' is a semantic instrumental: make an inscription 'with runes', 'by means of runes'. In contrast, the preposition *ī* is followed by an accusative in the inscription on the Eikeland brooch. Yet rather than a reason to interpret the Eikeland text as featuring a phrasal verb that employs a preposition instead of the expected adverb, a more regular assumption would be that a different (non-instrumental) meaning was intended by the use of the accusative. The Eikeland text seems most regularly to be taken as featuring a prepositional phrase (KJ 17a; Grønvik 1987, 53; Syrett 1994, 90 note 23):

ekwizwiwiowrituiruno︤zᴀ︥sni
ek Wīz Wiwjō wrītu ī rūnōz Asni
'I, Wiz, of the descendants of Wiz, write into runes for Asniz.'

The use of the accusative *rūnōz* presumably has a different meaning than a dative: 'into' rather than 'in', 'with' or 'by means of' runes. The act of writing recorded in the Eikeland text appears to be indicated by the accusative inflection to indicate transmission from one state to another; cf. Old Norse *kom honum í málið* 'bring him into the case' (*Njáls saga* 67; Bragi Halldórsson et al. 1987, 203). Rather than a reference to the use of runes as an instrument of communication, the Eikeland text appears to refer to runes as the medium into which words had been transformed: from spoken to written language.

A similar employment of an allative meaning 'into' appears to be preserved in the section of the Stentoften inscription that has generally been taken as recording a curse. It is interpreted by Schulte (2018, 99) in the following manner:

hideʀrunonofelᴀhekᴀhed | eʀᴀginorunoʀ
H(a)iderrūnō [ro]nu fel^ah-eka hed^era, ginnorūnōr
'Der Glanzrunen (Reihe) verberge ich hier, mächtige Runen.'

Yet *hed^era* is not a locative adverb ('here'), it is an allative adverb ('hither') indicating movement towards a place. Old Norse *héðra* can be used to mean 'here', but the distinction between *hér* 'here' (< **hízr*) and *héðra* 'hither' (< **hidrê*) is common to all the Germanic languages and the 'bright runes' on the Stentoften stone can hardly be said to be hidden. The verb **felhan* is not regularly understood as 'hide' or 'conceal' in this sentence, but rather as 'entrust', another meaning for the verb attested in Old Norse expressions such as *fal Óðni allan þann val* 'entrusted all the slain to Óðinn' (*Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*; Rafn 1829, 454) and *mey frumunga fal hann megi Gjúka* 'he entrusted the maiden to Gjúki's sons' (*Sigurðarkviða*

in skamma, st. 4; Kuhn 1983, 207); compare the Old High German cognate *felhan* 'to trust, to hand over'. The runes seem to have been entrusted to the stone in the curse on the Stentoften monument in a similar manner as a message was transmitted 'into runes' on the Eikeland clasp.

Other early runic inscriptions that have been proposed to feature phrasal verbs include the text on the Garbølle box that Krause (in Krause and Jankuhn 1966, 73) suggested reading as **hagiradaz i tawide**. Krause's interpretation appears both phonologically and syntactically unlikely, however, and Imer (2015, 91) takes the form interpreted as a preposition by Krause merely as an interpunct. Similarly, Schuhmann (2016) has argued that the form **wraita** on the Trollhättan II bracteate (Imer 2015, 293) should be interpreted as **wrait a** 'wrote in(to)', where Poulsen (2020) sees only a phonologically archaic first-person singular preterite **wraita** (and cf. Eythórsson 1999). The final **-a* of the first-person preterites have been widely assumed to have already been lost by the migration period (and the nasal of *an* still retained, cf. the preposition **an** on the Tjurkö bracteate [KJ 136]), but **wraita** is also attested on the Reistad stone (KJ 74), leading Poulsen to concur with Antonsen (1975, no. 41; 2002, 7 f.; 2007) who had long argued that the loss of **-a* was comparatively late (cf. Mees 2021, 115–19). Looijenga (2003, 163) suggests that the form **talgidai** on the Nøvling fibula (KJ 13a) might be interpreted as 'carved in' and Mees (2011, 287) proposes a similar connection of the Stentoften inscription's **gᴀf ↕** with Old Norse *gefa … á* 'give out, pour' (as an alternative to an ideographic reading).[2] Yet no absolutely clear examples of phrasal verbs are recorded in early runic epigraphy – and while absence of evidence may not be evidence of absence, constructions of this sort could have been a relatively late development in North Germanic.

Compound verbs

The other kind of verbal enlargement often argued to be attested in early runic inscriptions is the inherited tradition of forming compound verbs. The presence of compound verbs in early North Germanic texts, however, must be assessed in terms of Schulte's (2003a; 2003b; 2005) claim that pro-sodically light, unstressed prefixes are completely absent from the early

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[2] The reflex of earlier **an* 'on, upon' should have been pronounced with a nasal vowel at the date of the creation of the Stentoften inscription, but as the Gummarp stone's **ṣtᴀᵬa ᵬṛịa** 'three staves' (KJ 95) demonstrates, the marking of nasal vowels is inconsistent in transitional runic inscriptions.

runic corpus. The loss of common inherited preverbs such as *ga- and *bi- must have led to a great reduction in the number of morphologically distinct inherited compound verbs in North Germanic. Unlike Noreen (1923, 132) and Voyles (1992, 103), Schulte (2003a; 2003b; 2005) does not associate North Germanic prefix loss directly with the widespread syncopation that is characteristic of the transitional inscriptions of the sixth to eighth centuries, instead linking their elimination to a prehistoric development in early North Germanic prosodic structure. Noreen (1923, 132) only offered a loose timeframe for the reduction of unstressed prefixes in North Germanic, between the mid-fifth and end of the ninth centuries AD, and Voyles (1992, 103) proposes an end-sixth-century date. Schulte argues for a much earlier date, at least for light or phonologically short preverbs, a development that would make the language of the early runic inscriptions crucially different in this way from East and West Germanic at a much earlier time than is usually accepted.

There are some clear traces of retentions of earlier *ga- in Old Norse, but only in cases where the loss of the unstressed prefixal vowel resulted in sequences that could be maintained phonotactically. Forms such as Old Norse *greiða* 'prepare for riding' have long been explained by Gothic expressions such as *garaidjan* 'arrange', Old Norse *gnógr* 'enough' and *glíkr* 'like' by Gothic *ganōhs* 'enough' and *geleiks* 'like' respectively (cf. Noreen 1923, 135). Some Old Norse verbs similarly seem to preserve aspectual semantics of types that suggest the phonological loss of the preverb has not resulted in the loss of the aspectual distinction previously supplied by prefixation. For example, Old Norse *lúka* 'shut' is often thought to have developed a meaning comparable to those attested by Gothic *galūkan* 'lock up, shut up' and Old High German *bilūhhan* 'shut' by means of a lost preverb given its proposed etymological origin in a root merely meaning 'bend' (Rix 2001, 416).

Nonetheless Schulte assumes that the North Germanic loss of the unstressed prefixal vowel is earlier than the similar reduction that affected stem vowels in early North Germanic terms such as **irilaz** that is first clearly attested in the transitional runic period. Schulte (following Syrett 2002, 726) cites the evidence of the lack of aspectual *ga- prefixes in the early runic past participles **haitinaz** and **slaginaz** as part of his claim (KJ 61 Kalleby and KJ 99 Möjbro). But given the existence of the similarly prefixless Gothic past participles *haitans* and *slahans* (in a language that conserves all manner of preverbs), this contention would seem to be rather presumptive. Clear examples of prefix loss cannot be isolated in the early runic inscriptions much as the evidence for phrasal verbs is not compelling.

What seems best taken as an early runic compound verb has only been discovered since Schulte's proposal was published. The analysis by Rau and Nedoma (2014) of an inscription carved in mirror-runes on the fragment of a spear-shaft from the Nydam bog (Nydam 10 in Imer 2015, 203) has revealed a form that appears to indicate a relatively late date for the preservation of inherited (light) preverbs in North Germanic. The Nydam piece features decoration of the interlace kind found on similarly dating spear-shafts from the moor at Kragehul (Iversen 2010, 65–69, 163 and tables 33–39) and the inscription treated by Rau and Nedoma is executed in the same multiple-stroke style as is the longer runic text on a spear-shaft unearthed in 1877 from the Kragehul bog (KJ 27). The mirrored Nydam text was discovered in 1999 and probably dates to the late fifth century AD. Its text was first assumed to be merely decorative and not linguistically significant (Stoklund 2003, 178).

Rau (in Rau and Nedoma) argues that the Nydam spear-shaft text should be read **tau̯iteka**, preceded by a paratextual symbol. Nedoma duly interprets the mirror-rune text as if it features only two words, a first-person singular subject pronoun **eka** and a neuter singular past participle **tau̯it**. The proposed past participle is explained by Nedoma to be a syncopated reflex of putative neuter singular **tawidat* to **taujan* 'do, make'. The appearance of the pronoun **eka** seems syntactically unlikely in collocation only with a past participle as past participles are usually attested only with copula verbs or auxiliaries such as reflexes of **habjaną* 'have' or have the function of adjectives (cf. Hirt 1934, 180; Faarlund 2004, 67, 122, 130; Schrodt 2004, 9–18, 32 f.). Nedoma provides no examples of past participles followed by pronouns in the Germanic languages to justify his unlikely proposal and there are no examples otherwise in early runic epigraphy that feature a comparable syntax.

A more regular interpretation would be to take the text before -**ka** as featuring a syntactically raised first-person singular verb. Eythórsson (2001; 2012) explains the non-initial position commonly taken by first-person subject pronouns in early runic inscriptions as due to verb raising, and early runic inscriptions preserve two different first-person subject clitic pronouns: -*ka* after a first-person verb ending in a vowel and -*eka* after a first-person verb ending with a consonant. The Lindholmen amulet's *ha(i)tē-ka* (KJ 29) and the Ällerstad stone's *raisidō-ka* (KJ 59) are examples of the first phonological environment, with loss of the vowel from the clitic occurring in the usual manner attested cross-linguistically (Schiering 2006). The rarer post-consonantal environment is attested in the Stentoften inscription's *felǝh-eka* (Mees 2020).

Rather than a syntactically unparalleled past participle plus pronoun construction, the most obvious interpretation of the verb in the Nydam spear-shaft inscription is as a first-person singular form of the North Germanic cognate of the Gothic weak class-III verb *witan* 'watch', the Old High German weak class-III verb *ir-wizzēn* 'become wise, know, be able' and the Old English weak class-II verb *bi-witian* 'observe, take care of, administer, perform' with the initial lexeme **ta** best taken as a cognate of the West Germanic adverb **ta* 'to, towards' (cf. Old English *te*, Old Saxon *te, ti*, Old High German *zi, za, ze*), the weakly stressed variant of **tō* 'to, towards' (cf. Old English *tō*, Old Saxon *tō*, Old High German *zuo*). Germanic **witaną* 'know' is a preterite-present verb with an expected first-person singular **wait*, while the Germanic strong verb **wītaną* 'see, witness, blame' has an expected first-person singular reflex **wītu* in an early runic inscription. The North Germanic cognate of Gothic *witan* 'watch' was evidently lost from Old Norse, but a present participle is usually assumed to be preserved in the Tune memorial's **witad͡ah͡alaiban** (KJ 72).

Gothic *witan* 'watch' has a particularly protective use. As well as ὁρέω 'see' (Matthew 27:4), *witan* is employed to translate Greek φυλάσσω 'guard, watch' (Luke 2:8, Timothy II: 4:15), φρουρέω 'guard' (a city; Corinthians II 11:32), παρατηρέω 'watch closely, observe scrupulously' (Luke 6:7, Mark 3:2 and Galatians 4:10), συντηρέω 'keep close, preserve' (Mark 6:20) and τηρέω 'watch over, guard' (in the sense 'observe' the sabbath; John 9:16). The use of a cognate of Gothic *witan* 'watch' on the Nydam spear-shaft would seem similarly best to be accepted as protective, much as might be expected for a text engraved in mirror-runes on a military object; compare the similar use of mirror-runes (to represent the 'charm word' **alu**) on the Spong Hill cinerary urns (Pieper 1987; Waxenberger 2018).

The North Germanic cognate of Gothic *witan* 'watch' is represented by Schulte (2018, 99) as **witēn-* and he duly takes the Tune memorial's **witad͡a**- as a reflex of an earlier **witēnda-* 'watching', an interpretation that violates Osthoff's law (Jasanoff 1978, 61). The *-ē-* recorded in North Germanic is usually accepted to continue an earlier *-ai-* (Ringe 2017, 157–59; Fulk 2018, 310–12) and the first-person singular present indicative ending of the class-III weak verbs in Old Norse is either zero or *-i* (< **-ē*). The older diphthongal vocalism appears to be reflected in the Tungrian names *Lubainis* (*CIL*, 13: no. 3622; cf. Gothic *lubains* 'hope') and *Vanaenia* (*CIL*, 13: no. 3624; cf. Gothic *wanains* 'a lack, a want') from Namur, contrary to Streitberg's (1896, 306–11) account of the weak class-III verbs that is reflected in Schulte's (2018, 99) representation **witēn-*, and the Old Norse ending *-i* is evidently generalised from the stem vowel of the second- and third-person singular

-*ir* that continues Proto-Germanic **-ais, *-aiþ* (Ringe 2017, 158; Fulk 2018, 311 f.). But Gothic *witan* 'watch' has a clear cognate in Latin *videō, vidēre* 'see' as well as Lithuanian *pa-vydéti* 'envy' (< **u̯id-ē-*), and **tɑuitekɑ** seems best explained as reflecting *ta-witĕ-ka* 'I watch over, I guard'.

From a dialectal perspective, the use of the preverb **ta-* suggests that the Nydam inscription may be West Germanic. Antonsen (1975, 26–28; 2002, 17–36) and Garcia Losquiño (2015) argue that the early runic inscriptions sometimes feature West Germanic traits and the use of **ta-* on the Nydam spear-shaft is most obviously explained as West Germanic. The Nydam moor is situated on the border of the Iron Age Anglian territory, and it may have been part of a deposition that Kruse (2017, 176) associates with a defeated army of Angles. Yet the inscription on the Kragehul spear-shaft similarly features *bĭ*, a preposition inherited from Proto-Germanic that is not reflected in Old Norse, which points to the employment of *ta* at Nydam simply being an archaism – an inheritance from Proto-Germanic. The use of the derivationally weak form is presumably consistent with the use of *ta-* as a preverb given the employment of descendants of **ta-* as preverbs in Old English (cf. *te-flowan, tō-flowan* 'flow in different directions, to disperse' etc.), with later generalisation of reflexes of the strong form **tō*. Minkova (2008, 23) notes that the Old English prefix *tō* is always unstressed, and as Thim (2012, 81–89) observes, preverbs represent a syntactic archaism in Old English. The distribution of later reflexes of **ta* is clearer in Old High German where *zi, za, ze* (the regular gloss for Latin *ad*) is more consistently distinguished from *zuo* as the generalised preposition (e.g. in *zi samane* 'together') while *zuo-* is commoner as a preverb and *zi-* is retained in forms such *zi-gān* 'dissolve, perish' where it is often later substituted by *zer-* (Seebold 2001, 335, 339).

Conclusion

Formal analyses of the word order of early runic inscriptions have often been lacking from interpretations proposed by runologists. Most linguistic investigation of early runic texts has tended to be phonological and etymological, the syntactic aspects of the inscriptions often neglected. The analysis of the Eikeland inscription as containing a phrasal verb seems unlikely given its use of a preposition rather than an adverb and the interpretation of the mirrored Nydam inscription as featuring a past participle and a pronoun is unparalleled in Old Norse or indeed any of the Germanic languages. Explicit justifications of presumed syntaxes are rarely supplied by runologists, but historical syntax is now much better understood than

it was a generation ago and an interpretation that is syntactically irregular is no better than one that features phonological or etymological errors.

Nonetheless a more syntactically sophisticated analysis of the Eikeland inscription does not change its proper interpretation as much as is required for the mirrored text on the Nydam spear-shaft. A more syntactically justified approach to the Nydam spear-shaft inscription suggests that it is most profitably taken as featuring a compound verb. Despite Schulte's assertion that North Germanic prefix loss is much earlier than it has traditionally been dated, the mirrored Nydam inscription appears to preserve a preverb in a fifth-century inscription in line with the dates traditionally assumed for North Germanic prefix loss. The appearance of both phrasal and compound verbs in Old English seems to represent evidence that both object-verb and verb-object word orders are reflected in the language, and the evidence for compound verbs in the early runic inscriptions from Vimose and Nydam suggests a similar syntactic archaism was preserved at an early stage in the runic record. Such evidence makes the early runic inscriptions seem closer to Proto-Germanic than they are sometimes argued to be and underlines the importance of taking a broader comparative view of the earliest epigraphic evidence from Scandinavia.

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