# The Origin of the
# Greek First Person Plural Active Suffix -*men*

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In this brief paper it is suggested that the *n*-element of the Greek first person plural active suffix -*men* derives from an analogical extension of the Indo-European third person plural active (secondary) ending *-(e/o)n.

Among the persistent problems of Indo-European linguistics is the origin of the *n*-element of the Greek first person plural active suffix -*men*. As Buck (1933: 245) observes: "The -*men* of Attic-Ionic, etc., agrees with Skt. secondary -*ma* except for the final -*n* (of uncertain source) . . .". A concise summary of the scholarship devoted to the question of the source of this nasal element during the past century appears in a recent article by Cohen (1979), along with a novel proposal that "-*n* in -*men* is derived from the *-m . . . recon- structed [in Cohen 1975—K. S.] for 1 pl. mid." -*metha* < *-*methṃ* (1979: 109).[1]) Since Cohen's arguments clearly demonstrate that this long-standing problem of Indo-European verb morphology re- mains very much alive today, I wish to offer still another possible solution. The word *possible* must be emphasized because I submit my hypothesis only as a reasonable alternative to those devised heretofore. To be sure, the paucity of our present data makes a definitive answer to this question of the origin of -*men* quite un- likely. Still, since relatively few questions of historical/comparative linguistics yield simple solutions, additional speculation regarding this matter does indeed represent a legitimate scholarly inquiry.

As I indicated in my first note, Cohen (1975) presents evidence that a suffix of the second person plural can be analogically ex- tended within a verbal paradigm to the first person plural. Of course, when one considers such analogical extensions of personal markers, one naturally thinks of Benveniste's assertion (1971) that in the singular it is the third person "which will tend to impose its form on the rest of the paradigm, irrespective of the form of . . . any other person" (Watkins 1962: 90). This same developmental tend-

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[1]) After documenting that "a 2 pl. ending can be tacked onto a 1 pl. ending," as in the Cypriot Greek suffix -*mente* (< -*men* + -*te*) and Russian imperative constructions like *pojděmte* (< *pojděm* + -*te*) 'let's go', Cohen (1979: 109–110) argues that *-*methṃ* represents a contamination of the Indo- European first person plural ending *-*me* and the zero-grade form of the second person plural ending *-*dhwom*. See Cohen 1979 for details.

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ency also manifests itself in the plural number. Kuryłowicz (1964: 150) thus says: "In the plural the 3rd p. forms the semantic foundation for the 1st and 2nd p. plur. In O. English and in O. Saxon the prehistoric endings of the strong verbs were *-aþ in the 2nd p. plur. and *-anþ in the 3rd p. plur. The disappearance of the nasal before the fricative þ engendered the following relation:

| 3rd p. plur. *-óþ (long vowel)
↓ 2nd p. plur. *-aþ (corresponding short vowel).

The merger of the desinences -nþ and -þ entailed the identification of the accompanying prosodic feature: the length of *-óþ was imparted to the vowel of the subordinate 2nd p. plur. Hence *-óþ, phonetically shortened to -aþ in the historical languages. Another consequence of this semi-phonetic, semi-morphological merger was the introduction of *-óþ (> -aþ) into the 1st p. plur.: 'vos laudant' for laudatis entails 'nos laudant' instead of laudamus, hence one form only for the plur., viz. the old form of the 3rd p." I am reluctant to elevate the importance of the third person in analogical paradigmatic change to the status of a universal because of troubling counter-evidence (cf. Rudzīte 1964: 359, Puhvel 1970: 631–632, Schmalstieg 1975, Cohen 1975: 69, and Shields 1978) which suggests that "a more careful theoretical stance in evaluating paradigmatic person hierarchies is strongly indicated" (Puhvel 1970: 632). Nevertheless, the existence of a tendency for the third person to extend itself within a verbal paradigm is beyond question.

Today it is widely assumed that the original Indo-European active verbal suffixes of the plural were *-me (first person), *-te (second person), and *-nt (third person), cf. Kerns and Schwartz 1971: 3–4,[2]) although the number of attested variations of the first two desinences implies that "die Formen im Idg. selbst nicht ein-

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[2]) The distinction between the so-called primary and secondary endings of Indo-European active verbs is a rather late development which generally results from the addition of the deictic particle *i to personal markers. As Seebold (1971: 189) says: "Für die Aktiv-Reihe bekommen wir in der einfachsten Form, den sogenannten Sekundär-Endungen, im Singular in der 1. Person *-m, in der 2. *-s, in der 3. *-t. Die Endungen des Präsens, die Primär-Endungen *-mi/*-si/*-ti, unterscheiden sich von dieser Reihe nur durch ein -i, das heute üblicherweise als eine deiktische Partikel zur Bezeichnung des 'Jetzt' erklärt wird. Auf jeden Fall sind diese beiden Ausprägungen der Aktiv-Reihe genau parallel und weisen damit auf gemeinsamen Ursprung." However, the historical dialects indicate that in the plural and dual numbers, the distinction between the two series of endings was not so clearly drawn, except for the third person plural.

heitlich waren" (Watkins 1969: 35). Watkins (1969: 35) thus notes: "... in der 1. und 2. Pl. haben wir die globalen Zeichen -*me* -*te* angenommen, obwohl die meisten idg. Sprachen auf Varianten mit Ablaut oder Erweiterung (oder beidem) deuten wie *-*mo* (air. -*m*), *-*me/osi* (ved. -*masi*), *-*mos* (lat. -*mus*), *-*mes* (dor. -*mes*), *-*men* (gr. -*men*), *-*meni* (heth. -*meni*), *-*teni* (heth. -*teni*), *-*tes* (lat. -*tis*) u.a., ..." In the case of the third person plural suffix *-(e/o)nt* (Skt. -*n*, Gk. -*n*, OCS -ϱ), it has traditionally been held that *-*nt* has been reduced to the attested forms in -*n* "by the normal cause of phonetic development" occurring in each of the relevant dialects (Burrow 1973: 310). However, I believe that the original form of this suffix in Indo-European was simply *-(e/o)n*. Schmalstieg (1974: 190) says: "The Greek 3rd pl. active imperfect *épher-on* is usually considered cognate with the Skt. 3rd pl. active imperfect *ábhar-an*. It is usually assumed that in these forms a final *-*t* has been lost both in Greek and Sanskrit, but the assumption is unnecessary. Both forms could reflect final *-*on* ... Likewise, it is usually thought that the OCS 3rd pl. aorist ending encountered in (*id-*)ϱ '(they) went' reflects Indo-European *-*ont*. Again the assumption of a final *-*t* is unnecessary. An Indo-European final *-*on* would have passed to Proto-Slavic *-*un* which could have developed either into *-ŭ > -ъ or -ų̯ = -ϱ. In this case the latter variant was chosen. (See Schmalstieg, 1971, 139–140.) Similarly, the Gothic 3rd pl. secondary ending -*un* may reflect IE *-ų̯ without a final *-*t*." Schmalstieg (1976: 25) further proposes that "the old verbal ending *-*on* is preserved ... perhaps in the Lith. nom. pl. pres. act. participle in -*ų*, if this is an etymological 3rd pl. as Cowgill, 1970, suggests" and that "the same thing seems to be true for the Tokharian B 3rd pl. *palk-em̃* (*pälken-ne*) ... the 3rd pl. ending -*en*(-) could be derived from Indo-European *-*on*(-)" (1977: 295). In Shields 1980, I argue that the Oscan-Umbrian third person plural secondary desinence -*ns* shows this ancient Indo-European third person plural suffix in *-*n* in contamination with the element *-*is*, cf. Lat. -*is-tī*. "Thus, I maintain that only the primary third person plural ending (*-(e/o)nti*), which results from a contamination of the old ending *-(e/o)n* and the third person singular primary suffix *-*ti*, shows the formant *-*t*, while the secondary ending of this suffix retains into the dialects the original form in *-*n*' (Shields 1978: 135)" (Shields 1980: 72–73).[3]

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[3] I believe that the third person plural suffix *-(e/o)n* is to be derived from the ancient third person singular suffix *-∅, cf. Watkins 1969: 49–50,

What all of this ultimately leads me to propose is that the -$n$ of the Greek suffix -*men* represents an analogical extension of the third person plural suffix *-(e/o)n* to the first person. Indeed, I believe that there was a widespread tendency for this extension to occur within late Indo-European and the early dialects. Burrow (1973: 308) points out that the same -$n$ is found in the first person plural of Hittite: "In Greek there is a . . . termination -*men*, used both as a primary and secondary ending. It was customary to regard the final -$n$ of this form as ephelcystic, and to equate the Gk. ending with the Skt. secondary ending [-*ma*—K. S.], but it is now clear from Hittite that this is not so. The Hittite terminations are: P. *weni, meni* (with *i* appended as in Skt. *masi*), S. *wen, men*." Moreover, Vedic Sanskrit attests an alternate form of the first person plural active ending in -*mā*. Burrow (1973: 308) notes that "forms with long vowel which appear . . . particularly in the perfect (*vidmá*, etc.) appear to be ancient, and not merely metrical lengthening, on account of the occurrence of similar formations in other languages: Lith. *sukomé-s* (reflexive), Goth. *bairaima* opt. (out of \**mē* or \**mō*)." Now both Szemerényi (1980: 199–200, 217, 308) and Schmalstieg (1974) argue that in Indo-European there existed pairs of sandhi doublets in \*-*VN* (*V = vowel, N = nasal*) and \*-*V̄*, with the latter variant developing from the former. A very clear example of this alternation involves "the Indo-European 1st sg. secondary ending \*-*om* and the primary ending \*-*ō* (derived from \*-*om* . . .). In general the phonologically newer form in \*-*ō* takes over the primary function of the present tense, whereas the older form, the ending \*-*om* is found in the non-present formations. Thus, for example, we find the 1st sg. pres. Gk. *phér-ō*, Skt. *bhár-ā-mi* vs. the 1st sg. imperfect Gk. *épher-on*, Skt. *ábhar-am*" (Schmalstieg 1974: 187). Therefore, these long-vowel variants are also probably reflexes of an original Indo-European suffix \*-*me/on*. In the second person plural, the same extension of \*-*(e/o)n* is also attested. As Burrow (1973: 309) says: "The primary endings with aspiration ([Skt.—K. S.] -*tha* < *tHe*) do not appear outside Indo-Iranian.[4]) The other languages have normally one form which serves as both primary and secondary ending, and this corresponds to the secondary ending of Indo-Iranian ([Skt. -*ta*]—K.S.). Hittite has evolved a distinction between primary and secondary ending here in quite a

plus a deictic particle \*-*(e/o)n*, which was later reanalyzed as a plural marker and then as a personal (plural) marker. See Shields Forthcoming for details.

[4]) Szemerényi (1980: 218) observes that "arisch -*th*- ist eine Neuerung."

different way (P. *teni*, S. *ten*). The longer forms [of the Sanskrit endings — K.S.] were analyzed as *tha-na* and *ta-na*, the *na* being regarded as an appended particle, and the whole form as a Sanskrit innovation. In view of Hitt. *-ten* we should analyze rather *-tan-a* of which *tan* corresponds exactly to Hitt. *ten*, and the *a* is simply a thematic enlargement such as is found elsewhere in the formation of words." The Baltic languages perhaps attest a related second person plural suffix in *-tē, a sandhi variant of *-ten. Endzelīns (1971: 205) notes that "Common Baltic -*tē* is reflected in the Lith. reflexive -*tė-s(i)*, e.g. *juñtatės* ʿ(you) feel' beside the active form -*t(e)*, e.g. *juñtate* and in the Latv. dial. reflexive -*tē-s* beside the active form -*t(e)* and, perhaps, in Pr. -*ti*, e.g. *asti* ʿ(you) are', *immaiti* ʿ(you) take', *turriti* ʿ(you) have'." Although Endzelīns (1971: 205) believes that this Baltic suffix "probably developed . . . from the first person plural ending -*mē*", this is by no means a necessary assumption.

Despite the fact that the analogical extension of the third person suffix *-(e/o)n* throughout the plural verbal paradigm took place in a wide variety of dialects, the question still remains as to why so many variations of the first and second plural endings exist in the dialects. The answer to this question is intimately related to the origin of the inflectional category *plural* itself. Hirt (1934: 23) maintains that "eine besondere flektierte Form für den Plural war demnach ursprünglich nicht notwendig." In support of this claim, he notes, for example, that "die neutralen *i*-Stämme gebrauchen als Plural im Aind. den Singular. *apratí, asthūrí, jāmí, bhūri, śámi, surabhí, máhi* (AV.)" (1934: 24). Likewise, "in diesem Fall haben wir auch zwei Fälle im Europäischen, nämlich | *tot* und *quot*. Vgl. *tot tam valida oppida, quot calamitates*" (Hirt 1934: 24). Lehmann (1974: 201–202) also writes: "The system of verb endings clearly points to an earlier period in which there was no verbal inflection for number . . . For the dual and plural endings are obviously defective. We cannot reconstruct endings in these two numbers which are as well supported as are those of the singular, except for the third plural . . . The number system is defective in substantival as well as in verbal inflection. The personal pronouns never did introduce expressions for plurality, as suppletive paradigms indicate, e.g. Hitt. *uk* ʿI', *uēš* ʿwe', etc., in contrast with demonstratives, e.g., *kāš, kē* 'this, these', and nouns, e.g., *antuhšaš, antuhšeš* ʿman, men' . . . Number accordingly was not consistently applied in late PIE and the early dialects in accordance with natural reference. Subsequently application became more regular, and number

congruence was carried out for both substantives and verbs." Because the category *plural* appeared so late in the evolution of Indo-European, the linguistic change involving the extension of the third person plural suffix *-(e/o)n* probably began just before the disintegration of the Indo-European speech community but was completed only within the individual dialects. Of course, according to contemporary variation theory, a linguistic change "begins variably rather than categorically; that is, it begins as a rule that sometimes operates and sometimes does not" (Bailey 1973: 157). After a linguistic innovation is initiated and begins to alternate with an original variant, it may or may not become generalized, cf. Labov 1966: 328–329. The fact that the extension of *-(e/o)n* was a "change in progress" at the time of the disintegration of the Indo-European speech community explains why it "died out" in some dialects or "lost out" to competing changes (cf. Wang 1969), like the extension of the plural suffix *-s* as a means of hypercharacterizing a personal suffix as a plural marker (e.g. Dor. *-mes*, Lat. *-tis*), in others.[5] Moreover, variation theory has also demonstrated that a linguistic change only gradually undergoes diffusion to all relevant environments as it becomes generalized at the expense of an original form, cf. Reighard 1974: 251, Chen and Wang 1975: 256. Thus, the limitation of the analogically extended suffix *-(e/o)n* (or its sandhi doublet) to the first person in some dialects (like Greek) may be a result of the innovation "petering out" (cf. Chen and Wang 1975: 256) before it was able to reach its maximum potential distribution. It is probably true that in some early dialects additional impetus for the extension of the third person plural ending to the first person and its retention in that environment was provided through analogical pressure exerted by the first person singular (secondary) suffix *-m*, which became *-n* in these same subgroups (including Greek). In other words, the final nasal marker of the first person plural was subject to reanalysis as a means of hypercharacterizing the suffix as a first person desinence.[6]

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[5] Sometimes the innovative and the original variants continue to coexist for long periods of time, as in the case of Skt. *-than-a* and *-tha*. At other times the two variants may become permanently specialized, cf. Wang 1969: 15. This situtation is exemplified by the Gothic first person plural suffixes *-ma* (< *-mē/ō* < *-me/on*) and *-m* (< *-me/o(s)*, cf. Brugmann 1916: 620), since the former variant has been limited to the optative function.

[6] Of course, it is possible that the Greek second-third person dual active suffix *-ton* may represent an identical extension of *-(e/o)n* to *-te* since the

Again I must emphasize that the theory which I have presented here is not intended to represent *the* solution to the riddle posed by the Greek suffix -*men*. However, I feel that it is as reasonable as any hypothesis devised heretofore and that it should cherefore be given serious consideration as an explanatory statement.

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dual and the plural originally constituted a single morphological category (*non-singular*) which bifurcated into dual and plural at a very late date (Schmalstieg 1974: 192 and Shields 1977: 59–66). But the apparent Sanskrit cognate -*tam* (second person dual), with final -*m*, presents a problem for this interpretation unless one assumes that *-m* and *-n* originally constitued variants of a single morphophoneme in *-N*. I shall leave this question open here.

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