

The Development and Function of the Dialectal *them*

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Considering the development of the deictic system in English and drawing a comparison with some deictics in related languages, an attempt is made to interpret non-standard *them* as a deictic with a wide scope, including that of the plural definite article.

1. A very prominent and widespread feature of non-standard English, much exploited in the performing arts and literature, is *them*, as in '*Don't worry about them dogs, they won't bite*'.¹

Them is usually taken to be the equivalent of *those*, less frequently *these* (Fries 1940), and thus classified as a demonstrative adjective. It will be argued in the present paper that *them* has a wider scope of reference, as implied by the example above. It will also be suggested that the form is best analyzed within non-standard grammar, since the deictic system of non-standard English is not organized in the same way as its standard English equivalent.

1.1. Descriptive standard English grammars, even when they discuss the phenomenon of language variation at length (see Quirk et al. 1972), or when they have 'many millions of words from speech and writing.. gathered together in a computer' (Cobuild 1990) as a base, do not even mention the adjectival usage of *them*. By avoiding any comment, grammars of standard English clearly exclude it from both formal and colloquial educated usage. It is unlikely that the form is never found at the 'lower (variable) pole' of the 'main stable common core of the language', which Quirk et al. (1972: 30) claim to be describing.

But the adjectival *them* does not occur even in the Leonard study of usage (Marckwardt & Walcott 1938), which includes 230 items 'of whose standing there might be some question', which were assessed by a group of educated judges as

¹ Uttered by a lower middle-class character in the American film *Born the 4th of July*.

'established', 'disputable' or 'illiterate'. Many examples which in modern standard usage would be regarded as unacceptable, were judged as not 'definitely illiterate'. So the absence of the adjectival *them* in the study could probably be understood as the omission of doubtlessly illiterate usage. It cannot be assumed to be rare, because contemporary observations of school children's language registered its presence in a considerable degree (Arnold 1967: 45).

Textbooks with rules for 'correct English' published in the first half of the 20th century (discussed by Arnold 1967: 45) consider the use of *them* as a demonstrative adjective to be 'wholly unpermissible' and prohibit it explicitly. This seems to corroborate our assessment that the usage was unambiguously stigmatized. Contrary to most authors, Noah Webster defends the legitimacy of the form on the grounds of its long-standing and widespread usage (nine-tenths of speakers are said to be still using it). He seems to agree, though, that it is socially unacceptable because it 'may be censured as vulgar' (Mencken 1936: 29f).

1.2. English grammars written from a historical point of view, such as Curme's (1931) or Jespersen's (1956), classify this usage of *them* as *popular* (Curme) or *vulgar* (Jespersen). Jespersen defines it as a rank-shifted Personal Pronoun (Part II Syntax), his point being that whereas pronouns normally function as primaries (subjects, objects), *them* can in 'vulgar speech' occur as an adjunct (modifier) too, like standard *those*.

1.3. In accounts of dialectal grammars (for example, Milroy 1989, McDavid Jr. 1967, Claxton 1981) the non-standard *them* is generally classified as 'a demonstrative adjective for distant reference used with a plural noun' (Beal 1989) and again as corresponding to standard English *those*.

Since *them* is not recognized as a member of the class of demonstrative pronouns or adjectives of any of the standard varieties of Modern English, the profitability of defining it in terms of standard English grammar is doubtful. The form *them* is persistent and versatile, and as Noah Webster claimed, it has survived from Old English. Having begun to spread in late Middle English or early Modern English, both geographically and functionally, it still continues to do so. For this reason it deserves to be reconsidered in greater detail.

2. Deixis and markedness

2.1. From the grammatical point of view, demonstratives belong to the pronominal system, and from the semantic to the deictics. Deixis is perceived by Lyons as a primitive linguistic category, evolving in face to face communication from simple utterances used to draw attention or point to something. As the system of deictics becomes more elaborate, the category is variously grammaticalized or lexicalized. In his words, 'by deixis is meant the location and identification of persons, objects, events, processes and activities being talked about, or referred to, in relation to the spatiotemporal context created and sustained by the act of utterance and the participation in it, typically, of a single speaker and at least one addressee' (Lyons 1977:

575f). Deictic systems essentially contain pronominals, among which demonstratives are most prominently deictic, giving information on the location of the referent in terms of proximity to the communicative situation. They also mark at least some other pronominal properties such as number, gender and case.

In its development, the primitive deictic system has become more elaborate with respect to deictic forms as well as deictic scope. A late acquisition to the system is the definite article, in languages that have it. In Lyons's definition it is a neutral demonstrative, lacking information on pronominal properties as well as on proximity. It has only the function of informing 'the addressee that some specific entity is being referred to, without however giving him any locative (or qualitative) information about it'. (Lyons 1977: 654). Quirk and Wrenn (1956) speak about this function as 'merely' particularizing, singling out from generality, indicating and identifying the known and expected, and Mustanoja (1960) says that it singles out individuals, focuses attention on their generic qualities, and generalizes. The definitions are as vague as the function of the definite article, which is borne out by the lack of invariable rules for its usage, differences in usage found among (related) languages that have articles, as well as among varieties of one and the same language. The only unequivocal point is that it is a very neutral, or general, or rudimentary and weak deictic, and it cannot function independently as most other deictics can.

As the deictic system develops from a concrete situational function to more abstract and textbound ones, deictics acquire even anaphoric functions.² Pronominals generally participate in all types of deixis to various degrees. It is therefore impossible to concentrate only on demonstratives without accounting for at least some other members of the system.

2.2. Markedness is here considered to be a property occurring at all levels of language organization. Marked forms are characterized by greater phonetic substance and more specific grammatical and semantic functions than unmarked forms. Accordingly, marked forms can survive longer in the system, because it takes longer for them to disappear physically through processes of reduction. Unmarked forms, on the other hand, are more easily reducible and lend themselves to abstract or very generalized functions.

I should also like to suggest that markedness is not a matter of presence or absence of a property, but rather a matter of its degree. It is thus possible to speak of demonstratives as deictically more marked than personal pronouns and the article.³

3. English demonstratives in a historical perspective

Retracing the development of the English deictics from their Indo-European origins, it can be noticed that demonstrative pronouns are phonologically distinct and compact forms, suitable for frequent use. They characteristically consist of a monosyllabic stem with a dental consonant (masc. pl. nom. Greek *toi*, Irish *te*, Latin

² It has been found for instance (Byrne 1988) that in some creole languages deictics develop into subordinate conjunctions.

³ A similar view is expressed by Wessén (1962: 107).

isti, Lithuanian *te*, Slavic *ti*) still found in modern IE languages. Furthermore, at all stages of language evolution demonstrative pronouns (and the deictic system in general) have had strong and weak, i.e., stressed and unstressed forms, depending on their prominence in the sentence or discourse. And, like other frequently used forms, the deictics occur in numerous (dialectal) variants.

Similarities of deictic systems are even greater among the Germanic languages (Gothic *pai*, often in variation with *s-* as in the Old English sg. nom. masc. *se*, fem. *seo*, neut. *pat*, Old Scandinavian *sa*, *su*, *par*), undergoing analogous developments and reshufflings of their members and functions. Weak forms were in many contexts pronounced with little stress, causing a loss of phonetic substance (Samuels 1972), which in turn drained the forms of some of their meaning. Having thus become communicatively indistinct such forms were eligible for new, more general or abstract functions. Stronger forms, such as derivatives, compounds, or phrases, replaced the original simple forms in marked functions.

The process can be observed in all Germanic languages where the historically attested deictic systems had (among other forms) two sets of demonstrative pronouns, simple and compound. The latter is an extension of the simple forms by means of a demonstrative particle **sa-si*, **se-si*. Demonstratives could be both independent (pronominal, primary) and dependent (adnominal, adjectival, secondary) syntactic elements. In addition, as compounds and in collocation with prepositions, demonstratives assumed adverbial (*thus*, *in this way*) and conjunctive (*that*, *therefore*) functions. Simple demonstratives, even when weakened, tended to retain some of their original properties in addition to a more neutral deictic role.

3.1. Whereas the primary function of the demonstratives was deictic, they also defined the referents with respect to number (one – more than one), gender (male, female, neutral), and case (nominative, genitive, dative, accusative), standing for a number of such relationships as agent – patient, goal – source, location – direction, etc. Quirk & Wrenn (1957: 69f) illustrate the functions of the two demonstratives with the following example from the Anglo Saxon Chronicle:

'on pyssum géare for se micla here þe we gefyrn ymbe spræcon', interpreted as 'in this year (this one, of a chronicled series of equally specific years) that (or the) large enemy force (i.e. not simply a force of unidentified enemies not previously encountered, but the particular one) of which we spoke earlier went...'

The simple demonstrative (*se*) is clearly a weak (unstressed) form such as might optionally be used in the above interpretation in languages without a systemic article (e.g. Slavic languages). In these languages a weak simple demonstrative (such as the Croatian inflected *taj*, *ta*, *to*; *ti*, *te*, *ta*), often serves as a semantically void form, for example a rhythmic filler in lame verse. The weak form however, can still function as a proper 'pointing' deictic, situational or textual, as in the sentence *'And hi þa pet underfengon'* (AS Chronicle, quoted in Mitchell & Robinson 1982: 206). If we consider the function of demonstratives in these two texts it can be understood as anaphoric and somewhat ambiguous as to the demonstrative vs. neutral deictic functions. Although it is difficult to decide definitely what is meant, the intelligibility of the text is not endangered.

The new demonstrative *þis*, stronger in phonetic substance and meaning, is fully marked for deixis as well as proximity. It refers to a close position from the point of view of the communicative situation, as can be seen in the following example from the Anglo Saxon Chronicle (quoted in Mitchell & Robinson 1982: 206):

'992. Her Oswald *se* eadiga, arcebisceop forlet *þis* lif and geferde *þæt* heofonlice...', which we may interpret as '(entry for the year) 992. Here (now, in this year = textual deixis, reference to the year stated in the text) Oswald, the (or that) blessed bishop, left this life and passed to the (that) heavenly (one)...'

This is to say that the distinction near vs. distant, albeit somewhat abstract in this case, is expressed by marked (new, compound) vs. unmarked (old, simple) demonstrative forms respectively.

The feature marking proximity, which is an elaboration on the simple pointing function, can be further emphasized by collocating various deictics, for example, *her on þis (Þissum) gear* (here, mentioned just now) and *on þam ylcan gear* (the/that same year as mentioned earlier).⁴

Another weak deictic form in Old English is the relativizing (uninflected) particle *þe/ðe*, which in collocation with weak demonstratives expressed some other deictic specifications (gender, number, case), and referred anaphorically to a preceding nominal:

Se waes Hroþgare haeleþa leofost
rice randwiga, *þone ðe* heo on raeste abreat

'He (literally "this/the one") whom she killed in his resting-place was the most beloved of heroes to Hrothgar, a mighty shield-warrior' (Mitchell & Robinson, 1982: 75).

In this example the particle serves to underline the anaphoric function of the demonstrative and, as a subordinator, the syntactic relations within the sentence. When there is no particle the clause introduced by the demonstrative pronoun is paratactic, whereas the pronoun itself approaches the primitive demonstrative (pointing) function, and so do the possible substitute forms *þone* (demonstrative pronoun) and *hine* (personal pronoun).

Modern English *them* goes back to Old English masculine and neuter singular dative forms and the general plural dative of the demonstrative pronoun *þaem/þam*, with parallels in other Germanic languages, for example in Old Norse, which is relevant for the development of the English deictic system. Old Norse *þeim*, masculine singular and general plural, is a weak demonstrative form⁵ which had spread to the paradigm of personal pronouns. It acquired the function of the general plural of third person personal pronoun to replace weaker and more ambiguous forms. Such a rearrangement

⁴ Germanic languages have also a third demonstrative pronoun, in Old English *geon* (in the phrase *to geonre byrig* "to that city" recorded only in early West Saxon, Campbell, 1959), ON *hinn, inn*, Go *jains*, which is both phonologically and semantically weaker, and less marked. Some of the results are the suffixed definite article in Scandinavian languages (Haugen, 1976: 297ff) and distant reference in English varieties respectively.

⁵ The parallel strong form is *þeima*.

of deictics is possible because the deictic range covered by members of the system is variable.⁶

The predominantly Northern and Scottish forms *þeʒʒm*, *þeym*, *þam* and unstressed *them* were recorded (OED 1871) functioning as datives and accusatives in Middle English, and even as nominatives in late Middle and early Modern English (Caxton) even as nominatives, as the following examples show:

He *þam* forsoke in all *þer* nedis (cca 975)
 patt he *þeʒʒm*... Forʒæfe *peʒʒre* giltess. (Ormin, cca 1200)
 Crist loked *þaim* vnto (Harrowing of Hell, cca 1300)
 All the four brethren and all *theym* of theyr companye arrayed
 them selfe. (Caxton, Sonnes of Aymon ii.78, 1489)

The processes that caused the weakening of inflections in Old English generated considerable shifts and new developments in the deictic system. The natural pattern was followed where stronger forms replaced weaker ones in marked functions. Weaker forms, in turn, acquired, new unmarked functions (the definite article, the relative linking word). The result in Middle English was a more elaborate range of deictics, which appeared in texts in an abundance of dialectal forms surpassing the range found in Old English.

The surviving forms of the weak demonstrative are the singular neuter nominative/accusative *þat/that* and the plural, which merged with the Old Norse paradigm to give *thai/thei*, *their*, *them*.

The form *that* lost its gender and case markers and eventually entailed the entire former demonstrative paradigm. Survivals of cases, including a weakened dative *than*, appear in adverbial combinations with prepositions (*forthi*, *fortha*, *after than*, etc.). The weak plural forms *þa* and *þo* were replaced in the 13th century by new, stronger forms *thas/thos*. Mustanoja (1960: 170) is of the opinion that they were formed analogically to the plural of nouns with the suffix *-s*.

The weak neuter demonstrative *that* in its unstressed form developed further into a general relative, displacing the still weaker particle *þe*, after a period during which both forms were in some dialects distinguished in function.⁷ The particle *þe* in turn emerged in the now distinct, but even less marked, function of the definite article *þe/the*.

The weak plural demonstrative paradigm replaced the ambiguous plural paradigm of the third person personal pronoun (*hi/hie*). The new dative plural *them* now combined the functions of both the dative and the accusative, matching the same development of the singular case forms. It is believed (Mustanoja 1960) that the change started in the Northern dialects, under the influence of Old Norse, where the change had taken place earlier. It spread steadily southwards, to become generally accepted by the 15th century.

3.2. The weakening of the highly marked deictic functions of the demonstratives is best seen in northern texts of the 10th century where demonstratives are used for

⁶ It has to be remarked about the dative case that it was a much used case, fulfilling several syntactic functions, and being governed by a number of prepositions, adjectives and verbs. For this reason, it was ambiguous and accessible to additional neutral and abstract functions.

⁷ This form was almost overused since it functioned also as subordinating conjunction for subject and object clauses.

personal pronouns as in þa *beoþ nu mid him and hell* (Poema Morale 270). This practice is perhaps influenced by Latin (Mustanoja 1960: 129) or, more likely by Scandinavian usage. On the other hand, there are texts where personal pronouns of the third person are used with demonstrative force, as Mustanoja puts it, for example, *bitwixen Theseus and hym Arcite* (Chaucer CT A Kn. 1210). The function is obviously not primarily demonstrative (strongly deictic), but rather neutral or general, not unlike the definite article.

The Middle English form *them* is also used as the dative plural of third person personal pronouns, and thus with a less marked deictic range. There are records from the early 13th century where the dative is dismantled of yet another specific function, i.e. case, and is used for the nominative as in the following 15th century example: *hem þat etiþ good fleisch* (Mustanoja 1960: 129).

The Old English compound demonstratives (*þes, þeos, þis*) were in turn reduced to the uniform *þis* by the end of the 12th century, when a new plural with the suffix *-e* (*thise*) emerged and was established in all areas except in the North (Northern: *þire, þeir*, etc.) by the middle of the 15th century. *This – thise* and *that – those* were in Middle English used independently and as adjuncts in new deictic functions, indicating near and distant reference respectively. Around the 14th century another demonstrative for distant reference – *yon, yond, yonder* – was in Northern Middle English dialects derived from the rare Old English demonstrative *geon* (Mustanoja 1960/178). Counterbalancing the generalization of *that* the strong demonstratives evolved into functionally discrete forms.

In Middle English there are also occasional phrasal deictic forms, like Modern English *this one* or *that one*, which must be assumed to have been more frequent in spoken discourse. Such practice is in keeping with the general method of replacement of weakened structures.

3.3. In standard Modern English the Middle English demonstrative pronouns, *this – these, that – those*, continue to function as strong deictics for near and distant reference, independently or as adjuncts. The definite article, used only adnominally, is a weak, general deictic. As to the adjectival (adnominal) use of *those*, I would like to suggest that in addition to its basic demonstrative function, both *this – these* (Perlman 1969) and *that – those* when unstressed approach the functions of the articles. They are stripped of their proximic meaning and resemble articles with a little more phonetic substance than *the* and additionally marked to imply number, emphasis, attitude etc. These marked deictics are demonstratives of near and distant reference only when stressed, in the same way as a stressed personal pronoun is in *He is a liar* (also Middle English above). The mention of stress implies that the spoken language is in focus, which, we may conclude, has the category of a marked article.

Analyzing the function of (unstressed) *this* American English, Perlman (1969) finds that it is an extension of the indefinite article. *This – these* implies in the first place 'more information coming' as in *I saw this movie yesterday*, not implied by *I saw a movie yesterday*, which is neutral. The definite article in *I saw the movie yesterday*, unlike *this*, signals 'common experience of both speaker and person addressed' (and possibly 'more information coming'). It seems obvious that *this* is a marked variant of the indefinite article, which can also be seen from contrastive examples supplied by

Perlman, where only the definite article is grammatical, for example, *The house is John's*, **A house is John's*, **This house is John's* Perlman further shows how *this* as an article is different from *this* as a demonstrative in expressions 'where other modifying structures do not place the head noun in close proximity to the speaker', for example in the sentence *Take this man I was talking to last night, for example* (Perlman 1969: 77).

The pair *that* – *those* on the other hand, seem to be extensions of the definite article, sharing the 'common knowledge' element and thus being acceptable in examples like: *The house is John's*, *That house is John's*, or *I've got the book, and I think you ought to read it; I've got that book, and I think you ought to read it; They returned those chairs they borrowed yesterday (I told you about them, remember?), They returned the chairs they borrowed yesterday (I may have told you about them).*⁸

It is clear that the deictic functions of the demonstrative and the article overlapped in earlier English even more than they do today. It is part of the natural process that marked forms are used to elaborate on the function of the unmarked set. And though *them* in standard English usage does not find application outside its function as the oblique case of the personal pronoun, vernaculars have developed other rules.

4. Dialectal deictics

Vernacular varieties have not necessarily followed the same line of development as the standard variety. The development of the 'demonstrative adjective' *them* has been explained as leading from the functions of the Middle English form to both a personal pronoun (substitute for the weakened Old English *hem*) and a pronominal and adjectival demonstrative (Graband, 1956 discussed in Arnold 1967). It is also significant that the disintegration of the inflectional system allowed the switching of the nominative and the remaining oblique case forms of pronouns as can be seen from a variety of dialectal texts between the 12th and the 15th century (Mustanoja, 1960, Arnold, 1967). And whereas the process of standardization (in progress since the 16th century) produced a norm by which the nominative and oblique forms have defined syntactic and semantic functions, switching the two has remained a widespread phenomenon in vernacular usage, for example,

Us don't want t' play wi' he. (Suffolk),
alongside the widely accepted:

It's them.

This seems to be a general tendency in languages with case syncretism, as can be observed in the modern Scandinavian languages (Jørgensen 1992).

I would also like to argue that the oblique case form of the pronouns in adnominal position has been used for a number of functions in vernacular varieties. It thus stands

⁸ Compare also *They returned these chairs they borrowed yesterday (I forgot to tell you, they had some unexpected guests), They returned some chairs they borrowed yesterday.*

for several types of determiner deictic, without direct correspondence in the standard variety, such as

a) possessive determiner in the first person in some dialects, which in Standard English has a special form, distinct from the oblique case:

*Mi*⁹ tapes ave a sample o t people;
(West Riding, K.D. Shuttleworth 1990).
It's nobbut *thi* ffather!
It wor nobbut *us* Dad -
(West Riding, Arnold Kellet 1990).

b) general or neutral determiner (article) in the third person

Wall, *them* fellers ketched the dynamite all right,
(American West, Botkin 1955)

The standard varieties of English use possessive pronouns and the definite article or *those* in these structures.

If the form *them* is taken to be a demonstrative pronoun, or to derive from one, it has to be viewed together with other demonstratives in English vernaculars.

From some dialect descriptions (Edwards, 1989 of south-eastern English, Claxton, 1967 of Suffolk) the following outline of the dialectal demonstrative pronouns can be outlined:

	Near reference	Distant reference
Sg.	this ((over) here)	that ((over) there)
Pl.	these ((over) here)	<i>them</i> /they ((over) there)

The spread of adnominal *them* has been observed by Miller (1989) in Scottish English where two demonstratives for distant reference are competing, the traditional Scots plural demonstrative *thae* /ðei/ and the new *them*:

Thae cars was awfy dear.
Them cars was awfy dear.

From a number of accounts of other, often traditional, regional and rural dialects at a distance from the mainstream dialects of eastern and central England (for example, Harris 1989 on English in Ireland, Orton et al. 1962-71 on Cumbria, Durham, Lancashire, Manchester, Westmoreland, Yorkshire), the following variety of demonstratives, with three degrees of proximity, can be derived:

1. nearest: *thir*/this (one/two) here -
 them/these/*thir* (here) (ones/twos),
 tho (here)
2. more distant: *that* (one) (there), *yon* -
 them (here/there) (ones),
 tho, *those*, *yon*

⁹ The traditional dialectal spelling does not represent a different spoken form than the standard *me*. Both are pronounced /mi/ and have no individual stress unless emphasized.

3. most distant: that (one (over)) there/thonder/yonder,
 thon (one), tother, yon (one (over)),
 yonder, yond -
 them (over there/over yonder),
 thone ones, those over there,
 yon (over yon/yonder) yon yonder, yond

The above list represents demonstratives used pronominally and adnominally, for example:

Look at *them* (there) (ones) on th' pond.

Look at *them* (there) ducks on th' pond.

It is immediately obvious that the list of demonstratives has proliferated since Middle English. It contains a range of forms, from the original simple demonstratives like *tho*, *that*, over the earliest expanded form *this*, to its developments in Middle English *these*, *those*, *thir*. In some dialects (for example, Cockney, Irish and Black English) the dental fricative is pronounced as a stop (*dat*, *dem*), but it is never dropped. Demonstratives thus always retain a considerable phonetic substance.

What is also noticeable is the new phrasal forms *this here*, *them ones*, *them over yonder*, and *so on*, where various deictic properties are explicitly stated:

a) proximity: here, there, yon, yond, yonder, over here, over there, yon over, over yonder, yon over yon, yon over yonder

b) number: one, two, ones, these, those

Some phrasal demonstratives have fused a dental deictic element and another deictic such as *yon* and *other* to produce new compounds such as *thon*, *tother*, *thonder*.

Demonstratives variously mark such features as number or proximity. Thus, the phonetically weakest of the dental forms *tho*, and the stronger *thir* and *them* indicate plural number but are unspecified for proximity. Since proximity is the deictic feature at the highest end of the markedness scale, it is unambiguously expressed by additional deictics, demonstrative adverbs (*here*, *there*, *over*, *yonder*), in the most heavily marked forms.

The new way of expressing all but the most elementary deictic meanings is to add free elements to the original demonstrative. Any simple demonstrative in this system is a weak demonstrative. Thus *tho* and *them* are widespread forms used for very general deixis and plural reference. Additional deictic meanings are explicitly expressed by additional free elements.

However, the most productive deictic element is *them*, which has been spreading in probably all modern vernacular varieties, of which urban speech is probably in the lead.

4.1. The origin of this usage is thought to lie in the late Middle English and early Modern English period in north-eastern and southern Midlands (Arnold 1967). It is found in literary texts at the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century. Jespersen (1956) notes an example from 1596 as the earliest entry in the Oxford English Dictionary. As Arnold argues, early editions of Bunyan's work contain adjectival *them*, which was in later editions (such as the one from 1685) censored and replaced by *those*

in keeping with the norms set in contemporary grammars. Arnold has found that Ben Jonson in his *English Grammar* (1640) and later J.P. Priestley in his *Rudiments of English Grammar* (1772) find the adjectival use of *them* faulty. But as the following examples from a more recent edition of the OED (1971) show, the usage has developed continuously from Middle English and has taken longer to disappear from standard usage (particularly in America) than Arnold's findings suggest. It occurs in the following functions:

- a) independently in the subject position instead of the nominative,

Blessyd be *them* that hath brought that about (cca 1500)
In a moment *them* of the villages came down (Lithgow Trav. VII 333, 1637)
How less blest am I than *them* (Mickle, 1777)

- b) in the adjectival position with an object as a deictic of distant reference,

To Samaria and *them* partes (H. Clapham bible Hist. 92, 1596)
Foure of *them* hogs make a Kab. (Ainsworth, Anottated Pentat. Gen. XVIII 6, 1621)
If I had but one of *them* Hangmen (Cavallier, Mem. III 231, 1726)

- c) qualifying a nominative as a deictic with distant reference,

Augustine ... saith that *them* times were called eternall.
(Healey, Wive's Comment St. Augustine Citie of God XII, XVI, 1610), and

- d) as a weak deictic/article.

them few (dogs) which he kept must be tied up in the day time.
(Topsell, Four-footed Beasts 126 (1658)
major past theories or *them* sort of creatures called neuters (J. Crane in F. Chase, Hist. of Dartmouth (Mass.) Col. I 389, 1891)

4.2. In the vernacular *them* remained applicable for pronominal usage in the nominative and the oblique cases, as well as for adjectival usage, and was probably spreading. It eventually emerged in literature¹⁰ in representations of dialectal or other non-standard speech. Examples from the OED (1971) would suggest that the practice began in the early 19th century, possibly inspired by spoken usage and descriptions of dialects that were popular at that time (see the last two examples below):

I hope than the agent will give you encouragement about *them* mines (Mar. Edgeworth, Absentee XII, 1809-12)
It was a rare rise we got out of *them* chaps. (Thackeray, Catherine VII, 1840)
He don't believe in keeping none of *them* air prayer-book days. (Mrs. Stowe, Poganne P.i. 1878)
'Faithful an' True *them* Words be i' Scriptur. (Tennyson, Owd Rod VII, 1889)
them as says there's no has me to fecht. (Barrik, Little Minister iii, 1891)
Thaym at dyd it (Murray, Dial. S. Scott 184, 1873)
them are the women I meant (Forby, Vocab. of East Anglia Introd. 141, 1825)

The questions that arise are whether non-standard *them* is an equivalent of Standard English *those* or *the*, and what its function is in a non-standard deictic system.

¹⁰ Certainly in Victorian literature, where it marked class dialects, not only regional ones. (Blake, 1981).

5. Discussion

First of all the meaning of *them* has to be established by paraphrasing it with the strong deictic *those* and the weak deictic *the* in a number of typical examples, such as

1. Look at *them* ducks on the pond. (Suffolk, Claxton 1967)
 - a. Look at *those* ducks on the pond.
 - b. Look at *the* ducks on the pond.

The deictic in 1a. marks multiple distant referents; this is redundant as far as the addressee is concerned, but the reader/listener, who is not a direct participant in the situation, understands that there is a pond of undefined distance to the speaker and addressee, but that the ducks on it are certainly not near them. It is conceivable that there are several groups of ducks and that the addressee is looking at the wrong group, so now the speaker points with his hand towards the group he has in mind and stresses *those*. The disputed reference cannot be expressed by a stressed *them* in the same way. The prominently marked demonstrative, or strong deictic, is expressed by a demonstrative phrase explicitly marking proximity, for example, *them there ducks*, *them ducks over there*.

In 1.b. the (for the addressee) redundant proximic form is left out, so the reader/listener has no clue as to the distance of the pond or the ducks from the speaker and the addressee. The referent is not disputed. In the following example a customer in a fish and chips shop asks:

2. Are *them* chips ready? (Dublin English, Pavlović 1990)
 - a. Are *those* chips ready?
 - b. Are *the* chips ready?

Deixis in these sentences is not situational as in the previous example, but rather anaphorical, recalling an earlier verbal expression when ordering food. On the other hand it can imply the mood of the speaker (irritation with the sluggish service).

Whereas in the previous two examples both paraphrases are acceptable under certain premises, the definite and zero articles seem to be the only acceptable equivalents of *them* in the following case:

3. *Them* labber doe retrievers is good for fetching back ducks. (Southern American, Nicholson 1989)
 - a)**Those* Labrador retrievers are good for fetching ducks.
 - b) *The* Labrador retrievers are good for fetching ducks.
 - c) Labrador retrievers are good for fetching ducks.

What is being expressed here is weak deixis, with no other connotations (for example, pointing, proximity, mood). *Them* has clearly the function of generic reference (Quirk et al. 1972: 150) like the definite article (or its omission) in Standard English. The standard and non-standard deictic systems can be outlined as follows:

Standard English

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| a. this-these, that-those | strong deictics, stressed,
independent, adnominal
+ proximity + number |
|---------------------------|--|

- b. this-these, that-those weak deictics, unstressed,
adnominal
- proximity + number
- c. the weak deictic, unstressed,
adnominal
- proximity - number
- d. the /di/ strong deictic, stressed
adnominal
-proximity + number (= uniqueness)

The unstressed pairs under b) approach the definite article in function. They differ from it by their propensity to take on connotations other than deictic, and by being acceptable in rhythmic patterns different from those of the article because of their greater phonetic substance. In that respect, b. and c. are similar, but c. represents generic reference which b. does not, and it approaches the implication of 'uniqueness', not unlike d.

Non standard English (simplified):

- a. this - these/them/thae/they here...
that - those/them/thae/they there...
- b. this - these/them/thae/they
that - those/them/thae/they
- c. the - them/the

The non-standard systems are more elaborate than the standard one. They contain:

- a. a set strongly marked for proximity: ++ proximity
and marked for number: + number

Strong deixis is most frequently expressed overtly by multiple deictics.

- b. a set weakly marked for proximity: + proximity
and marked for number: +/- number
- c. a weak deictic, not marked for proximity: - proximity
and (optionally) marked for number: +/- number

From the studies available it was not possible to find enough evidence that would indicate whether the plural minimal deictic was obligatory or optional. But bearing in mind the influence of the standard variety on vernaculars, I am inclined to regard the category of number as optional. Plural (gender and case) forms of articles are not unusual since they occur in other (related) languages as well.

Another example of the multifunctional development of the original demonstratives can be found in the Scandinavian languages (with the exception of the rather more conservative Icelandic). Weak dental forms serve both as the article (*den - det*), the third person singular neuter personal pronoun (*den - det*), the nominative plural personal pronoun (*de*), and as demonstrative pronouns for distant reference. The strong forms (*denne, dette, disse*) mark near reference. In modern standard Swedish, however, and in colloquial usage generally, the disambiguating proximic and emphatic phrasal forms *den/det här, den/det där* are used for proximity. With the loss of inflections the old dative *dem* has been preserved in Norwegian in the oblique case of the third person plural personal pronoun, while in Swedish the weaker *den* is used.

Nevertheless, in standard Swedish and eastern Norwegian the variant dative forms *dem/dom* have spread in the spoken language in the nominative function regardless of the written form which remained *de*, and in spite of distinct tendencies towards the spelling pronunciation.

6. Conclusion

Them (like *that* is a deictic form that has survived from the Old English period because of its relatively ample phonetic substance. Case syncretism in English has allowed the pronominal form *them* to be applied to a number of deictic functions. Its development took different turns in the standard variety and in the vernaculars. It was restricted to only one function in standard English, whereas vernacular usage has marginalized case signals to such an extent that the deictic range of *them* could be generalized. The result seems to be that the dialectal *them* has become related to both the standard English demonstratives (*this-these, that-those*) and the articles (*the, Ø*). Additionally, the contrast between these two categories appears to be fuzzy in the standard variety as well. The dialectal *them* is as much a demonstrative adjective as it is a plural article.

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RAZVITAK I FUNKCIJA DIJALEKTALNOG *THEM*

Vrlo značajna odlika nestandardnih engleskih govora, mnogo korištena u književnosti i na sceni, jest *them* kao u *Don't worry about them dogs*.

Taj se oblik obično smatra ekvivalentom standardnom obliku *those*, te se svrstava među pokazne pridjeve. U ovom se članku želi pokazati da oblik *them* ima širi deiktički raspon, te da ga treba analizirati unutar nestandardnih gramatika.

Razmotrivši razvitak deiktičkog sustava u engleskom jeziku, a u usporedbi sa srodnim jezicima, želi se pokazati da nestandardno *them* može zauzimati položaj određenog člana u množini.