Networks of Old and Middle English Adjectival Constructions:
A diachronic Construction Grammar study

The aim of this paper is to trace the development of early English noun phrase with respect to the adjectival modification of the head noun. Data from Old English (OE) and Middle English (ME) will be compared and interpreted in the Construction Grammar (CxG) framework.

In OE, the adjective could precede its head noun or follow it, although the former scenario was visibly more frequent (Mitchell 1985, Fischer et al. 2000). Postposition could be simple, as in (1), or split, as in (2), where a second, preposed adjective and a conjunction are also present. Sometimes, the conjunction was not used, as in (3). Each of these patterns had a prenominal counterpart, shown in (4), (5), and (6), respectively.

(1) *assan frumcennedne* 'donkey firstborn' (cootest,Exod:34.20.3593)
(2) *hluttor wæter & wered* 'clear water and sweet' (cocathom1, ÆCHom_I,_34:469.114.6769)
(3) *getreowne þegn unsynnigne* 'honest thane guiltless' (cocura,CP:3.37.7.186)
(4) *ealde bytta* 'old bottles' (cowsgosp,Mt_[WSCp]:9.17.534)
(5) *stulor &digele swica* 'furtive and secret traitor' (cocathom2,ÆCHom_II,_28:228.215.5075)
(6) *ealdra hæþenra manna* 'old heathen men' (cogregdC,GD_2_[C]:8.121.17.1449)

Adjectival postposition in OE is accounted for with reference to a number of factors. Sampson (2010) shows that additional modification of phrase elements correlates with postposition. Fischer (2000, 2001, 2012) invokes the principle of linear iconicity, where (1)-(3) receive uniform treatment. In Haumann's (2003, 2010) deletion-based model, (1) and (3) are "true" postpositions, while (2) is "falsely" postposed. More recently, Grabski (2020) argued that each of (1)-(3) is a manifestation of a different construction, i.e. a conventional pairing of form and meaning, in the sense of Goldberg (1995, 2006), Croft (2007), or Traugott & Trousdale (2013). It is also suggested that the postpositional variants were conceptually linked to their preposed counterparts and also to each other, but these relations were already subject to reconfiguration in OE. A short glimpse into ME offered in this study implies that the network of mutual relations underwent further changes, but their exact nature is yet to be detailed. While Fischer et al. (2000) remark that the NP structure of the noun phrase remained largely unchanged between OE and ME, and Fischer (2004) claims that adjectival postposition in ME followed the principles outlined in Fischer (2000, 2001) for OE, there seems to be much room for the exploration of the topic in light of Grabski (2020).

In this paper, we propose a CxG analysis of patterns of adjectival modification in ME to address the following questions: a) Were the OE patterns (1)-(6) retained in ME? Can any change in their relative frequencies – which indicates function change under CxG – be observed? b) Do formal overlaps between the OE and ME patterns correspond to functional overlaps? Which OE constructions, i.e. pairings of form and meaning, survived into ME? c) How were constructional losses between OE and ME compensated? Were new patterns established, or were meanings which lost their former linguistic manifestations mapped onto existing patterns? d) Were the conceptual links between OE adjectival constructions reproduced in the ME network of corresponding constructions, or were they reconfigured?

We will conduct qualitative and quantitative analyses of data from YCOE (Taylor et al. 2003) and PPCME2 (Kroch et al. 2000), aided by statistical methods widely used in CxG studies (Stefanowitsch and Gries 2003). In the process, we hope to address the issue of general mechanisms of change in language, seen as a "complex adaptive system" (Beckner et al. 2009).

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