Orthographic Indications of Weakness in Early Middle English

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Margaret Laing

1 Introduction

1.1 The Mystery Bus Tour

I am an advocate and practitioner of the Mystery Bus Tour approach to academic investigation. This method of presentation describes the background of a research question, presents a series of observations and 'arrives' at the (previously unstated) destination by way of this ordered sequence of evidence. The tour guide, or author, has of course completed the tour in advance, but nevertheless takes the audience on essentially the same journey he made in the first instance himself. Part of the allure is that all the 'sights' should be fully investigated and appreciated before the denouement.

The Mystery Bus Tour is subtly different from the Court Room approach to a research question, in which the ultimate destination is announced at the outset and the evidence is then marshalled in its support. There is nothing inherently wrong with the Court Room approach, and with very complex problems it is often, for the sake of clarity, to be preferred to the Mystery Bus Tour. Its danger[2] lies in the tendency for the investigator to employ only the evidence that suits the desired outcome and/or to interpret any equivocal evidence solely in its favour. But responsibly carried out both approaches are respectable because all the 'sights' (or pieces of evidence) do actually exist and can be fully observed by the audience. Neither the Mystery Bus Tour nor the Court Room approach should be confused with the superficially similar Conjuring Trick approach, in which the astute observer can usually tell that the existence of the emerging rabbit has nothing much to do with the previously presented evidence.

This chapter is an experimental Mystery Bus Tour illustrating how one new methodology might be brought to bear on the illumination of classical questions in historical linguistics. It is largely an operational study, and the topic in question here is the conditioning of verbal syncope in Early Middle English. Because the methodology is likely to be unfamiliar to most readers, as it is largely based on work currently in progress, there may seem in this chapter to be a disproportionate early emphasis on method rather than on data. Exemplary data will be given during the course of the exposition. The full results represent a 'story so far' and are given in their entirety in Tables 7–11 in the Appendix with some commentary in §2.5.3. Discussion of the results is hedged with caveats (§2.5.2) which should be read before using the material in the tables.

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[1] The observations in this chapter arise from detailed analytical work on early Middle English manuscript texts being undertaken at the Institute for Historical Dialectology, Linguistics and English Language, School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences, University of Edinburgh, towards the compilation of A Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English (LAEME). This research project was supported from 2000–2006 by AHRC for which thanks are here expressed. I am extremely grateful to my collaborator and dear friend Roger Lass for patient and invaluable help with this complex chapter.

[2] Admittedly a threat for both approaches, but perhaps more insidious in the Court Room approach.

1.2 LALME and the self-limiting questionnaire

Of course, not all kinds of research lend themselves to the Mystery Bus Tour approach, and my own predilection for it is not because of a dominantly inherited gene for the appreciation of well-crafted whodunits, but because of the nature of the research I do: large-scale, corpus-based investigation of linguistic variation in Middle English texts. Large-scale investigations may be carried out partly deductively: that is, when one has an idea of what one is looking for and of what one is likely to find. This is essentially what *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediæval English* (*LALME*) illustrates. It uses the traditional tool of the dialectologist: the questionnaire. The advantage of the questionnaire is that the same list of pre-determined items is used to interrogate every text witness. This enables the investigator to address the key desiderata of dialectology: description and comparison. Admittedly, there was a certain amount of creative trial and error before *LALME*'s questionnaires for the northern and southern areas of survey were finalised; but they were also informed by considerable prior knowledge of orthographic variation in late Middle English. Because the contents of a questionnaire are, by definition, limited by the investigators' selection of items, the data elicited by it will also inevitably be limited (Williamson 1992/3:139). And because its items are pre-selected, its power to produce results that surprise us is also likely to be attenuated.

However, perhaps because of the sheer size of the endeavour, and the unprecedented detail of its coverage, the questionnaire became to a certain extent an inductive tool: *LALME* did in fact produce a great many surprises. Two powerful examples are: the confusion of <þ> and <y> as a single (usually <y>-shaped) symbol, used in both [i~j] contexts and [θ~ð] contexts, and its clearly northern and East-Midland distribution (Benskin, 1982); and the discrete distribution of the 'P' paradigm of the present indicative plural suffix (McIntosh 1983 [1989]).

With this sort of mixture of deductive and inductive analysis, procedure for an investigation may often be as follows:

1. collect pre-selected data;
2. make observations;
3. tabulate observations;
4. draw (expected) conclusions;
5. expand and/or refine the received view.[3]

1.3 LAEME and the open-ended heuristic approach

For *A Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English* (*LAEME*) we have developed a corpus-based approach and have adopted a different analytical tool. Instead of using a questionnaire, we transcribe all the early Middle English texts (or extensive samples of very long texts) in a format that can be 'tagged' and then processed electronically (using software written for the purpose by Keith Williamson):

> The advantage of this method is that *all* the linguistic data can be subjected to analysis without the investigator being committed to a pre-selected set of dialectal discriminants. The results of the analysis may then inform the selection of items for linguistic profiles and dialect mapping (Laing 1994:127).

[3] Though in the case of *LALME*, the scope and complexity of the investigation and the newness of its approach in relation to the particular body of data under investigation in fact resulted in radical change to previous knowledge of, and attitudes to, linguistic variation in Middle English.

From each tagged text is derived a text dictionary, which is the equivalent of a linguistic profile in *LALME*, but whose content is not limited to questionnaire items. A text dictionary is a taxonomised inventory of the entire surviving output of a text witness (or of the entire sample transcribed), and the resulting assemblage is a proper subset of a given scribe's total usage. Sets of tags (equivalent to (non-preselected) *LALME* questionnaire items) and their associated scribal forms may be compared electronically. The corpus, with its associated software, becomes the instrument of selection. The methodology thus develops a greatly enhanced heuristic function more purely inductive than the questionnaire. This leads to a variation of the Mystery Bus Tour, which is the Voyage of Discovery approach to investigation. Here the heuristic nature of the methodology changes the normal procedure, and the order in which its stages are carried out, in an apparently small but important way, as follows:

1. collect *all* available data;
2. identify and tabulate what looks potentially interesting, regardless of any prior knowledge;
3. make observations;
4. draw (surprise) conclusions;
5. possibly modify the received view

1.4 Weak segments and historical dialectology.
A weak segment is one that shows a propensity for either lenition processes or deletion, or occurs under positions of low prosodic prominence. Some segments are weak for phonetic reasons, e.g. [h] because, not having a supra-laryngeal articulation, it is therefore 'defective' (Lass 1976: 145–146, 156–163). Other segments may be weak because they are exceptionally short, such as vowels that may delete under low prominence. Others may have no inherent properties that define weakness, but display it because they preferentially delete or lenite in certain positions (see further Lass 1984: 177–182). A narrower and simpler definition of a weak segment is 'one that has a propensity for deletion'.

One of the main tasks of the historical dialectologist is the description and comparison of distributions of linguistic variants across space and through time. This can be done at any level of linguistic enquiry, syntactic, lexical, morphological, phonological or orthographic. Weak segments, with their propensity to delete, are by definition inherently subject to variation and change. They are therefore eminently suitable for dialectal and historical investigation.

In this chapter I am going to use the LAEME corpus to examine one category in which there are orthographic indications of segmental weakness in early Middle English: syncope in the verbal endings of (i) 2nd and 3rd singular present indicative, and (ii) of the weak preterite and past participle.

2 Verb syncope

2.1 Verbal endings: LALME and the research background
Variation in a number of types of verbal ending was subject to investigation in *LALME.* The verbal endings feature on the questionnaire as item nos 57–64 (*LALME* 3: xviii). Of the categories to be discussed in this chapter, no. 59 refers to '3sg present indicative', no. 61 to 'weak preterite' and no. 63 to 'weak past participle'. These were only collected systematically for the northern area of survey. However, the Index to the Appendix of Southern Forms (*LALME* 4: 345) includes the

categories: '3rd singular present indicative; forms other than *-eth*, *-eþ*', 'Contracted 3rd singular present indicative, *stant*, *fynt*, etc., and 'Weak past participle: forms other than *-ed*', and has references to the lists of LPs containing such forms (*LALME* 4: 323–324.[4] For weak preterite and past participle cf. also FELL pt. (4: 313) and questionnaire item nos. 88 BURN, 89 BURY, 93 CALL, 103 DIE, 104 DO, 106 DREAD, SPREAD, 142 HAVE, 167 LET pt., 207 READ pt. 210 SAY. The endings of 2sg present indicative were not collected for either the northern or southern area of survey, though they are recorded as sub-categories for particular verbs (e.g. 104 DO, 142 HAVE, 138 GO (south only)).

The notes to the relevant northern questionnaire items (*LALME* 3: xx, nos. 59, 61, 63) make it clear that in general the verbal endings were collected only for consonant stems, and hence, normally, for clearly syllabic examples. Vowel stem endings were only noted sporadically, mostly in late LPs, and then they were marked '*v*+'. For 3sg present indicative endings, the creators of *LALME* were primarily interested in the alternation between *-s* endings and *-th/-þ* endings, and in variation in the vowel of the inflection. For weak preterite and past participle, they were interested in the vowel of the inflection, and also in whether or not the following consonant showed devoicing. It was assumed that vowel stems would syncopate and consonant stems generally would not. Endings of the weak preterite and past participle that were not directly comparable, such as those in 'brought', 'taught', 'caught', 'wrought', 'kept', 'wept', left', reft', etc. were for the most part ignored. For the occasional unmarked example in the LPs of a non-syllabic inflection like *-d(e)* or *-t(e)* one is left wondering what the stem ending might have been.

Contraction in the 3sg present indicative was not recorded for the northern area of survey; we can perhaps assume that it was absent or rare. In the Appendix of Southern Forms, only the presence of contraction has been recorded, not the forms themselves; the original analyses would need to be revisited to find the phonological contexts for contraction in the output of individual scribal witnesses.

2.2 Verbal endings: the LAEME methodology

When I began work on LAEME, I was already familiar with the northern version of the *LALME* questionnaire from my work on the Middle English dialect material of Lincolnshire (Laing 1978). When I adopted the corpus methodology for the analysis of the early Middle English texts, I naturally elected to 'hive off' for tagging the same verbal inflections as were isolated in a questionnaire analysis. I wanted to investigate for early Middle English those same variables that had proved of interest in the later material. I also hived off the endings of the 2sg present indicative. The tagging methodology turned out to shine a very bright spotlight on this hiving-off process and caused me, over a very long period, to evolve an increasingly detailed system of specification for the tags of verbs.[5]

2.2.1 Hiving off and the problem of comparability

It can be seen from the LP entries to the questionnaire item nos. 59, 61 and 63 (*LALME* 3 *passim*), and from the listings of the forms for these items in the County

[4] McIntosh was responsible for the northern area of survey and Samuels for the southern. Their data collection methods were not identical. For a detailed discussion and explanation see Benskin (1991: 210–219).

[5] Note that the following discussion ignores the preterite-present verbs and the anomalous verbs, which for obvious reasons are treated separately in the tagging system. See Laing and Lass (forthc.: Introduction, chapter 4, §§4.4.4.9.2 and 4.4.4.9.3).

Dictionary (*LALME* 4: 108–114) that once a verbal inflection is detached from its stem and separately listed it becomes anonymous as to its phonological context. For *LALME*, however, we know that the recorded endings not marked as '*v*+' all belong to regular consonant stem verbs. That gives us sufficient context for sensible comparison and enables us to discern the regional distributions of inflectional vowel and consonant variation for the northern area of survey. Assessment of the complexities of verbal inflections in the southern area of survey has to take into account the range of items under which information has been recorded, as well as the fact that non-attestation may well imply a 'default' *-e-* inflexion.

Compared with *LALME*, which analyses manuscript texts dating from ca. 1350–1450, LAEME has a much reduced data source. It deals with texts dating between ca. 1150 and 1300 of which only about a tenth as many survive as from the later period. Surviving early Middle English texts are unevenly distributed as to local origins, and this patchy geographical coverage corresponds mainly to parts of the country that fall into *LALME*'s southern area of survey.[6] The differences in period and in the pattern of distribution of the source material make the picture of the verbal inflections in LAEME very different from that recorded in the *LALME* County Dictionary and Dot Maps (*LALME* 1, Dot Maps 645–650, 655–662). In the LAEME materials there is considerable evidence of: (a) verbal contraction in the 3sg present indicative; (b) syncope in 2sg and 3sg present indicative and also in weak preterite and past participle, even of consonant stem verbs; (c) variability in the syncope suggesting that it might be phonologically conditioned. In the circumstances, it was not sensible simply to stick to the *LALME* policy of hiving off only syllabic inflections. In order to be able to compare (perhaps regionally conditioned) variation in syncopated and non-syncopated verbal endings, the phonological context would have to be made explicit for each hived-off ending, not just for the endings of vowel-stem verbs.

2.2.2 LAEME transcription[7]

Texts are transcribed from original manuscripts or from photographic reproductions. Our transcription policy may be described as 'diplomatic'. In palaeographical terms it should perhaps be referred to as 'semi-diplomatic', since abbreviations are in most cases expanded traditionally, though the expansions are always differentiated as such. Transcriptions are made using upper case for 'plain text' manuscript letters. Thus manuscript *nedede* is transcribed NEDEDE. 'Capital letters' in the manuscript are preceded in the transcription by *. Thus manuscript *Stond* is transcribed *STOND.

Lower case letters in transcriptions are reserved for two functions: the expansion of abbreviations (which for the most part are conventionally expanded and are transparent),[8] and the transcription of non-Roman letters (see Table 1):

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[6] See further Laing (2000: 103–109) and Laing and Lass (2006: 420–421).

[7] For a fuller description than is given here see Laing and Lass (forthc.: Introduction, chapter 3, §3.4. Internal format). Note that the description given in Laing (1994) is now superseded and even that in Laing and Lass (2006) is in some particulars out of date.

[8] The bar or titulus over the preceding vowel that indicates a missing 'm' or 'n' is expanded according to context: e.g. *hī* HIM is expanded HIm, *sūne* SUN as SUnNE. Bars are also occasionally used over other letters, in Latin loanwords in early Middle English texts, to imply different expansions. In these cases the bar implies the same expansion as it would if used in Latin writing. These abbreviations are for the most part expanded conventionally: e.g. Latin *q̄* for *que* is sometimes taken over into early Middle English as a segment in a longer word — so *q̄me* PLEASE is transcribed. QueME. The abbreviation sign for <er>/<re>, whether it is shaped as ᵊ or as ʻ, is similarly expanded conventionally

Table 1

y = 'thorn' <þ>	*suggeþ* is transcribed SUGGEy
d = 'edh' <ð>	*seið* is transcribed SEId
w = 'wynn' <ƿ>	*schapest* is transcribed SCHAwEST
ae = 'æsc' <æ>	*dælde* is transcribed DaeLDE
z = 'yogh' <ȝ>	*þouȝten* is transcribed yOUzTEN
g = insular 'g' <ɡ>	*seɡɡd* is transcribed SEggD[9]

2.2.3 LAEME flagging and tagging[10]

Within the transcriptions, a set of non-alphabetic characters has special significance for the operation of the tagging program (Williamson 1992/3, Laing 1994). The flag that is used to signal inflectional endings is +. So the examples of verbal forms given above would be flagged as follows: SEGG+Ey, SEI+d, SCHAw+EST, DaeL+DE, yOUz+TEN, SEgg+D. The tagging program then assigns a tag to the full form and also to the hived-off ending.

> A LAEME tag
>
> is a set of coordinates in a multidimensional space. Tags serve as addresses in this space, enabling us to locate analytically tractable objects, so that they can be extracted for processing. The two primary coordinates of tag-space are lexico-semantic identity and grammatical function. [...] As we conceive tag-space, every item has grammatical coordinates, but not every item has lexical coordinates: e.g. [...] inflectional affixes are not given lexical labels, because they can be construed as carrying only grammatical information. In this we follow the common intuition that 'grammatical' forms are bound and lexical forms are free [...] Notationally, the most extended tag type consists of a lexical element ('lexel') and a grammatical element ('grammel'). Some tags, as

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according to context. So *eft᷑* AFTER is transcribed EFTer, *lau᷑d* LORD is transcribed LAUerD, *th᷑e* THREE is expanded THreE. The abbreviation sign for 'ur', whether looped or 2-shaped, is also conventionally expanded, e.g. *at᷒n* ATTIRE is transcribed ATurN, *bett²* BETTER is transcribed BETTur. In Latin writing ᷑ can stand for *con-*, *com-* or *cum-* according to context. In early Middle English the use of the abbreviation is uncommon and is limited to Latin and French loans: *᷑mune* COMMON is expanded as comMUNE, *᷑fort* COMFORT (from AF *confort*) is expanded as conFORT, *᷑ceiue* CONCEIVE is expanded as conCEIUE. When ᷑ is raised above the baseline, as the abbreviation for 'us' (also uncommon in the corpus), it is so expanded: e.g. *v᷑* US is expanded as Vus. The *littera* 'p' with a line through the descender is expanded conventionally as 'ar' or 'er' according to context: e.g. *ꝑte* PART is transcribed ParTE, *ꝑril* PERIL is transcribed PerIL The littera 'p' with an extended and recurved lobe is expanded conventionally as <ro>: e.g. *ꝓcessiune* PROCESSION is transcribed ProCESSIUNE. The abbreviation for noun plural is not common in early Middle English, but where it occurs it is always expanded 'es' not 'is' or 'ys': e.g, *cnich~* KNIGHTS is transcribed CNICHes. Looped flourishes on final 'g' or 'k' are comparatively common and these are expanded conventionally as 'e' or 'es' depending on shape and context: e.g. *bok~* BOOK is transcribed BOKe, *tokenyng~* TOKENING is transcribed TOKENYNGe, *askyng~* ASKINGS is transcribed ASKYNGes. Such expansions may serve wholly or in part as hived off suffixes. Recurved final 'r' for 're' is also not common in the early period, but where it appears it is transcribed Re.

[9] Note that we differentiate yogh and insular 'g'. The first is a figural development from the second and became perceived as a different *littera* from 'g' as a result of a post-Conquest realignment of litteral and potestatic mappings (i.e. mappings of symbol to sound). Because these changes are in progress during early Middle English we have elected to transcribe figurally rather than litterally (see further Laing forthc.). For an explanation of the doctrine of *littera* and the conventions used here (first established by Michael Benskin) see Benskin (1997: 1 n. 1 and 2001: 194 n. 4) and cf. also Laing and Lass (2003 and forthc., Introduction, chapter 2, §2.3.1), where the coinage 'potestatic' is explained.

[10] For fuller description than is given here see Laing and Lass (forthc.: Introduction, chapter 3, §3.4.10 Flags, and chapter 4 Tagging).

> indicated above, may consist of a grammel only, but none of a lexel only. (Laing and Lass forthc. Introduction, chapter 4, §4.1).

So each of the verb forms above would be assigned an extended tag with both lexel and grammel, and their inflectional suffixes would be assigned separate grammel-only tags as shown in Table 2:[11]

Table 2

Lexel and grammel	Grammel only
$say/vps13_SUGG+Ey	$/vps13_+Ey
$say/vps13_SEI+d	$/vps13[V]_+d
$show/vps12K2_SCHAw+EST	$/vps12[W]K2_+EST
$deal/vpt13_DaeL+DE	$/vpt13[L]_+DE
$think/vpt23_yOUz+TEN	$/vpt23[H]_+TEN
$say/vpp_SEgg+D	$/vpp[J]_+D

LAEME lexels are drawn from different linguistic sources. They may be modern English identifiers — as with the above examples. But if there is no modern English equivalent of the early Middle English word, or if a modern English word used as a label would prove misleading or ambiguous, an Old English or Old Scandinavian etymon may be adopted. In some cases a Middle English or a composite label is used. It can be seen from the above examples that $ marks the beginning of a tag and / separates the lexel from the grammel, For every early Middle English spelling in the corpus texts, the lexel contains identifying semantic information (or a mnemonic label for what lexical item the orthographic string represents in context), and the grammel contains part-of-speech information. Here v = verb, ps = present, pt = past/preterite, pp = past participle. The numerals refer to number (1 = singular, 2 = plural) and person (1 = first, 2 = second, 3 = third).

2.2.3.1 Extra specifiers for verb class

The further specifier K2 in the above examples in Table 2 line 3 above identifies the verb SHOW as being originally a Weak Class II verb (< OE *scēawian*): an origin that is not transparent from the modern English form of the lexel $show/v, but which may have an effect on the forms of the verb's inflections. Thematic *-i-* and its reflexes may survive in relevant parts of the paradigm, and in the case of 2sg and 3sg present indicative inflections, those with OE *-a-* (as in Weak Class II) seem to be more resistant to syncope than those with OE *-e-* The K2 specifier is carried over into the grammel-only tag of the inflection, so that the information is not lost when the inflectional endings are listed separately for the purposes of comparison. In this example, it would be possible therefore to compare the spelling +EST either with all other corpus examples of the 2sg inflection, or only with those that occur in other originally weak class II verbs. The same is true for any other hived-off ending in this category of verb.

Similar specifiers are also given for the following verb classes (here cited as if labelling infinitive forms, i.e. with vi as the grammel):

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[11] The assignment of a particular tag to a word of course depends on its context within the text being tagged. The examples here given for illustrative purposes are taken out of context, but they (and all the LAEME materials here presented) have been extracted from the corpus of tagged texts.

(a) K2[1] is added to the grammels of OE weak class I verbs with thematic *-i-*, e.g. $derian/viK2[1], $ferian/viK2[1], $herian/viK2[1] and the present tense forms of $swear/viK2[1];
(b) F is added to the grammels of verbs that are French loans of the *-er* and *-re* conjugations, e.g. $accord/viF, $waste/viF;
(c) Fier and Fir are added to the grammels of French loans of the *-ir* and *-ier* conjugations respectively, e.g. $serve/viFir, $catch/viFier.[12]
We might expect verbs in categories (a) and (c) to show some influence from thematic *-i-* in the form of their inflections.

2.2.3.2 Extra specifiers for stem endings
It will also be seen from the examples in Table 2 above that further labels may be inserted in the grammel-only tags of the inflexions. The specifier [V] in the tagged string $say/vps13_SEI+d $/vps13[V]_+d (Table 2 line 2) is the equivalent of '*v*+' in the *LALME* questionnaire, and marks the hived-off syncopated 'edh' ending as being from a form with stem-final vowel. In the LAEME corpus a large number of verbal inflections are marked in this way for stem-final vowels, because of potential syncope, and because of the desirability therefore of listing their endings separately from those of consonant stems. The following numbers, tenses and derived forms are marked for stem-final vowels: vps12, vps13, vps2 (all present indicative plurals) vpt (all weak past tense forms), v-imp22 (imperative plurals), vpp (weak past participles), vSpp (strong past participles — S = strong), vSpt (all strong past tenses), vi (infinitives), vn (verbal nouns = gerunds), vpsp (present participles).

For the present study, only the categories vps12, vps13, vpt, vpp are relevant. For these categories, it was observed during the long-drawn-out process of tagging that a number of stem-final consonants seemed also to favour syncope in some text languages. For vps13, it was early recognised that if syncope occurs in dental stems the inflection is assimilated, giving a syncopated form from which no suffix can be separated on the surface. The grammel in such cases is marked -ct (contracted). If 3sg present indicative dental stems are unsyncopated they are fully comparable to other unsyncopated endings and so are left unmarked: cf. YELD+Ey and YELT YIELDS; LET+Ey and LET LETS; READ+Ed and READ ADVISES; FOR+wURd+Ed and FOR+wURd PERISHES. These forms would be tagged as in Table 3:

Table 3

Unsyncopated		Syncopated
$yield/vps13_YELD+Ey	$/vps13_+Ey	$yield/vps13-ct_YELT
$lae:tan/vps13_LET+Ey	$/vps13_+Ey	$lae:tan/vps13-ct_LET
$rae:dan/vps13_READ+Ed	$vps13_+Ed	$rae:dan/vps13-ct_READ
$forweorYan/vps13_FOR+wURd+Ed		$forweorYan/vps13-ct_FOR+wURd
$for-/xp-v_FOR+	$vps13_+Ed	$for-/xp-v_FOR+

[12] Note that in marking French verbal loans in this way, I am not suggesting that the categories are stable in Anglo-French or indeed in Continental forms of Old French. The range of forms cited in the *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* (even taken from the largely normalised sources used in its compilation) indicate considerable leakage from one conjugation to another. My purpose in marking the grammels (as with the marking of original Weak Class II verbs) is to flag the possible survival of indications of the more archaic *-i-* conjugations.

For the other consonant stems that appeared to favour syncope, a system of further specifiers was created. These indicate the nature of the preceding stem-final element, thus providing for the LAEME corpus some of the contextual information lacking from the hived-off inflections in the *LALME* listings. Table 4 lists those used in the LAEME corpus:

Table 4

(a) nasals are marked [N]

cf.	$come/vps13_CUM+y	$/vps13[N]_+y
and	$come/vps13_CUM+Ey	$/vps13[N]_+Ey
cf.	$we:nan/vps12_wEN+ST	$/vps12[N]_+ST
and	$we:nan/vps12_wEN+EST	$/vps12[N]_+EST

(b) [r] is marked [R]

cf.	$hear/vpp_Y+HUR+D	$ge-/vpp_Y+	$/vpp[R]_+D
and	$hear/vpp_I+HER+ED	$ge-/vpp_I+	$/vpp[R]_+ED

(c) [l] is marked [L]

cf.	$fall/vps13_FAL+y	$/vps13[L]_+y
and	$fall/vps13_FALL+ES	$/vps13[L]_+ES

(d) [x][13] is marked [H]

cf.	$bu:gan/vps13_BOUz+y	$/vps13[H]_+y
and	$bu:gan/vps13_BUG+Ed	$/vps13[H]_+Ed

(e) velar stops are marked [K][14]

cf.	$break/vps12_BREC+ST	$/vps12[K]_+ST
and	$break/vps12_BREK+EST	$/vps12[K]_+EST
cf.	$bring/vps13_BRENG+y	$/vps13[K]_+y
and	$bring/vps13_BRING+Ey	$/vps13[K]_+Ey

(f) sibilants are marked [S]

cf.	$kiss/vpt13_KIS+TE	$/vpt13[S]_+TE
and	$kiss/vpt13_KISS+EDE	$/vpt13[S]_+EDE

(g) [p] is marked [P]

cf.	$leap/vps13_LHAP+y	$/vps13[P]_+y
and	$leap/vps13_LEP+Ed	$/vps13[P]_+Ed

(h) <f> is marked [F] [15]

[13] [x] is a cover term for both [ç~x] and [ɣ]. In phonemic terms, [ɣ] is an intervocalic allophone of /x/.

[14] So far, no differentiation has been made in the flagging between stem final single consonants and stem final consonant clusters. The final consonant of the stem is always that which determines the flag used. It is highly likely that verbs with stems ending in consonant clusters will behave differently from those ending in single consonants, but investigation of this will be left in LAEME to a later stage of analysis. On clusters see also note **17** below.

[15] Note here that we assign the [F] marking according to spelling, not presumed phonology. We wish to mark the use of <f>, because during the early Middle English period its use intervocalically is beginning to wane in favour of <v, u>. The inference is that stem-final <f> implies voicelessness, which might trigger syncope. However, it is impossible to tell whether graphic 'voicelessness' predicts

cf. $have/vpt12_HEF+DEST $/vpt12[F]_+DEST
and $have/vpt12_HEF+EDEST $/vpt12[F]_+EDEST
cf. also (not marked [F])
$have/vpt13_HAU+DE $/vpt13_+DE
and $have/vpt13_HAU+EDE $/vpt13_+EDE

(i) <w, p> are marked [W] [16]
cf. $blow/vps13_BLAW+S $/vps13[W]_+S
and $blow/vps13_BLOUw+ET $/vps13[W]_+ET

(j) [j] is marked [J]
e.g. $say/vps13_SEg^g+y[17] $/vps13[J]_+y
and $say/vpp_SEg^g+D $/vpp[J]_+D

(k) [t, d] are marked [D] [18]
cf. $hold/vps12_HALD+ST $/vps12[D]_+ST
and $hold/vps12_HOLD+EST $/vps12[D]_+EST

Note that the marker [D] is confined in the present tense to vps12 forms because dental stems in the 3rd person present indicative are either assimilated, providing no detachable ending (marked /vps13-ct), or are unsyncopated and as such are fully comparable to other unmarked unsyncopated endings (see above). The same is true for stem-final dentals in weak preterite and weak past participle; the inflection either assimilates and no ending can be hived off, or it does not and is fully comparable to other unsyncopated endings:

cf. $haeldan/vpt13_HELD
and $haeldan/vpt13_HELD+ED $/vpt13_+ED

---

syncope or vice versa. The source of this problem is the relatively recent phonemicisation of the fricative voice contrast in the early Middle English period, and the fact that there is sufficient scribal memory of OE <f>-spellings to allow them still to be used in some text languages. In the unsyncopated form, therefore, <f> may well represent intervocalic [v]. Conversely while <u> in BI+LEU+Ed may be taken to represent [v], in BE-LEU+y it is possible that it represents [f] as the 'underlying' stem final. In these complex circumstances we have decided to use the [F] marker simply to draw attention to retained <f>-spellings without making a potestatic commitment.

[16] Note that in the LAEME corpus syncopated spellings with preceding <w, p> are unusual. In almost all cases of syncope the 'w' has overtly 'vocalised' and is written <u>. In such cases the detached ending is therefore marked with [V] (for vowel) not [W]. It is this sound change that makes us consider the marking of 'w' stem finals still written <w, p> (which may imply continuing [w]) to be of potential historic interest.

[17] This form is from the *Ormulum* and the combination <ȝȝ> in Orm's orthography always implies [j]. The detached +y therefore has the tag $/vps13[J]. In some text languages the present singular indicative forms for 'say' retain <-gg->, e.g. SEGG+Ed; the detached endings in these cases are left unmarked since [dʒ] does not normally trigger syncope. In others, the forms show vocalisation with or without a retained affixal vowel (SEI+d/SEI+Ey); the detached endings being marked [V]. Note also that in other text languages it may not always be possible to tell whether stem finals spelled with yogh or insular 'g' represent [j] or [x]. The word's origins and the spelling system of the individual scribe are taken into consideration when assigning the specifying label, but some ambiguities will remain.

[18] Note, however, that if stem-final clusters have been reduced, the flag specifies for the surface form not for its etymological stem; so e.g. the inflection of HAL+ST (for HOLDEST) is marked with [L] not with [D]. On the treatment of stem final clusters cf. note **13** above.

Note, however, the special cases of weak preterite second singular and weak preterite plural syncopated forms in verbs with stem-final dentals. Here the *-d* of the inflexion, indicating that the form is past tense, assimilates and cannot be hived off. However, any extension to the inflexion indicating second person or plurality is of interest but is not directly comparable to other hived-off weak preterite endings in these categories. In these cases the second singular and the plural endings are hived off and the [D] flag specifies that they are from stem-final dentals:

cf.	\$send/vpt12_ZENT+EST	\$/vpt12[D]_+EST
but	\$have/vpt12_HEAU+EDEST	\$/vpt12_+EDEST

and

cf.	\$guilt/vpt23_ GULT+EN	\$/vpt23[D]_+EN
but	\$live/vpt23_LIU+E\DEN	\$/vpt23_+E\DEN

The stem-finals listed in (a)–(k) above are the only ones whose detached endings are given descriptive markers. The endings are marked in all cases, whether or not the stem-final element has in fact triggered syncope. The default is lack of marking, whether or not, in exceptional cases, the detached ending is syncopated. The unmarked default categories are confined to stem final [v], [θ], [ð], [ʃ], [tʃ] [dʒ], and for 3sg present indicative, weak preterite and weak past participle also [d] and [t].

It can be seen from the examples above that at least some of the verbal syncopation observable in the LAEME corpus is carried over from similar forms observable in Old English. In order to make any sense of the contexts for verb syncope in early Middle English it is necessary to assess what is observable in the Old English data.

2.3 Verb syncope in Old English — received wisdom

In what follows I summarise from the sections on verbal syncope in the standard Old English grammars.

2.3.1 Present tense[19]

(i) The endings *-est* and *-eþ* of 2nd and 3rd singular present indicative are derived from Gmc. **-isi*, **-iþi*.

(ii) The final *-t* in the 2nd person is assumed to have its origins in inverted forms:

> The *-t* ... is a West-Saxon innovation, where we find, other things being equal, *þu* **rīdest.* ... The source of the *-t* ... would appear to have come from inverted forms, *e*.g. **rīdes þu* 'ridest thou', the /t/ being introduced to ease the transition from /s/ to /θ/, and then being reinterpreted as part of the inflexion even in normal order (Hogg 1992: 149).

(iii) In Old English, **-isi*, **-iþi* gave rise in the strong verbs to regular *i*-umlaut of the root vowel (and change of *e* to *i*). In West-Saxon this is combined with generally observed syncope of the *-i-*: e.g. 3rd sg. *cymþ* from *cuman*, *bricþ* from *brecan*, *stent* from *standan*.

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[19] For fuller accounts see, for instance: Campbell (1959: §§732–734, 751), Sievers—Brunner (1942: §§354–359), Wright and Wright (1925: §476); and for a very detailed study Hedburg (1945) on which there are further observations in Löfvenberg (1948–9).

(iv) In West-Saxon, there was further simplification of consonant clusters resulting from syncope, e.g. *ngst* > *ncst* > *nst* (*brincst* and *brinst* < *bringan*); *-tþ* , *-dþ* > *-tt* (*lǣtt* < *lǣtan*, *bīett* < *bēodan*). For a full list see Campbell (1959: §732).

(v) In West-Saxon weak verbs of class I (all of which by definition have umlaut throughout the stem) also show syncope of the endings of 2nd and 3rd singular present indicative with accompanying consonant changes (Campbell (1959: §§751). Syncope is, however, more frequent in the strong verbs than in the weak verbs, where lack of syncope is observed especially after liquids and nasals. Verbs in weak class II (2nd and 3rd singular present in *-ast* and *-aþ*) resist syncope (Campbell 1959: §754), perhaps because [a] is not as 'weak' as [e].

(vi) In weak class III, *habban*, *secgan* and *hycgan* show syncope in early West Saxon as with class I verbs (*hycgan* varies), but forms of *secgan* and *hycgan* in late West Saxon do not show syncope; *libban* has 2nd and 3rd singular present indicative forms *leofast*, *leofaþ* following class II (Campbell 1959: §762).

(vii) Weak verbs of class I with a heavy closed syllable before a liquid or a nasal (Hedburg's (1945: 275) 'heavy consonant groups') also resist syncope. Such verbs tend to pass into class II in Old English: e.g. *frēfr(i)an*, *hyngr(i)an*, *timbr(i)an*, *đīegl(i)an*, *wrixl(i)an*.

(viii) In Anglian texts the endings of 2nd and 3rd singular present indicative are rarely syncopated and umlaut is levelled away. In Kentish the picture is mixed, the early Kentish charters showing mainly unsyncopated forms, the Kentish Glosses to Proverbs having 'prevailing syncope' (Campbell 1959: §§733, 751).

(ix) In the contracted verbs (*sēon*, *gefēon*, *plēon*, etc. (Campbell 1959: §743) *-h-* is retained in 2nd and 3rd present indicative in West Saxon (*siehst*, *siehþ*, etc), but not in Anglian (*-sīst*, *sīð*). Vocalic stems normally cause syncope of the inflectional vowel.

(x) In spite of being widespread in West Saxon, syncope is almost unknown in the poetic language which is 'predominantly late West Saxon but with elements of other dialects and earlier forms' (Godden 1992: 496). Syncope in Old English verse appears to be blocked because of the putative antiquity of the originals, and sometimes perhaps for metrical reasons where a disyllabic form is required. Lack of syncope thus becomes in West Saxon an indicator of formality, because it is seen as an archaism (Godden 1992: 497).

Summary: In West-Saxon (and to a lesser extent in Kentish), the vowel *-e-* (< **-i-*) in the endings of 2nd and 3rd singular present indicative in strong verbs, and (with certain exceptions) in weak verbs of class I, was dropped, more or less regularly. In Anglian the full, unsyncopated endings were the rule, except when the stem ended in a vowel. Syncope in Old English is therefore a marker for West Saxon, where it co-occurs with umlaut. The phonology of the stem (other than vowel stems) appears not to be significant for syncope in Old English; only dialect and register seem to have a bearing on its operation. See further Fulk (1992: 269–283) and references there cited.

2.3.2 Weak past tense[20]

(i) The endings *-ede* (1st and 3rd singular), *-edest* (2nd singular) and *-edon* (plural) of the past tense of weak class I verbs developed from earlier **-id-* + **-æ*, **-æs* and **-un*.

[20] For fuller accounts see, for instance: Campbell (1959: §§751, 753, 757), Sievers—Brunner (1942: §401), Wright and Wright (1925: §§523, 528, 534, 535).

(ii) In verbs with heavy root syllables, the original *-i-* is deleted, e.g. *dēmde*, *hīerdon.*
(iii) Simplification of consonant clusters resulting from syncope after heavy root syllables occurred in the same way as in the 2nd and 3rd singular present indicative, e.g. *slǣpte* < *slǣpan*, *mētte* < *mētan*, *cyste* < *cyssan*, *cȳdde* < *cȳþan* (see further Campbell (1959: §751).
(iv) In verbs with originally light root syllables syncopation is rare, except in those that end in *-t* or *-d*, e.g. *lette* (not **letede*) < *lettan*, *hredde* (not **hrededе*) < *hreddan* (Campbell 1959: §§752, 753).
(v) Verbs in class II (whether or not with heavy root syllables) have in the endings *-ode* (predominantly in West Saxon) and *-ade* (predominantly in Kentish and Anglian) (1st and 3rd singular), *-odest*, *-adest*) (2nd singular) and *-odon*, *-adon*) (plural), with the dental element added to earlier **-ō-*. These resist syncope, perhaps because [o, a] are not as 'weak' as [e].
(vi) In weak class III, *habban*, *secgan, hycgan* and *libban* all show syncope in the past tense (*hycgan* varies) in all dialects except in some late texts (Campbell 1959: §762).
(vii) Verbs with a heavy closed syllable before liquid or nasal have in West Saxon no syncope in the past tense (cf. §2.3.1 (vi) above and see Campbell (1959: §753)). In Northumbrian, however, these verbs may develop an epenthetic vowel and syncope, e.g. *hyngerde*.
(viii) Verbs with 'light' closed syllable[21] before liquid or nasal may or may not have syncope in West Saxon or Anglian: *efn(e)de*, *arefnde*, *egl(e)de*, *genæglede* (examples cited from Campbell (1959: §753 (3)).
(ix) 'A considerable group of verbs formed the past and past part. in Gmc. without using as a connexion between root and dental element the formative *-i-* of the present system....These verbs are often distinguished by the absence of mutation in the root syllable in the past and pass. part., although it is present in the pres. system: this follows from the absence of the connecting vowel *-i-* in past and pass. part.' (Campbell 1959: §753 (9)). These are verbs with root syllables ending in a velar consonant and having in Old English *ht* in the past and past participle: *bohte* < *bycgan*; *sōhte* < *sēcan*; *þōhte* < *þencan*; *þūhte* < *þyncan*; *worhte* < *wyrcan*. To this class may be added e.g. OE *cweahte* < *cweccan*; *reahte* < *reccan*; *tāhte* < *tǣcan* and, with root syllable ending in *l* also e.g. *cwealde* < *cwellan*; *tealde* < *tellan*. These added instances are generally assumed to represent subsequent developments, the verbs having lost their stem-formative in past and past participle as a result of later syncopation by analogy with the proto-Germanic set (see further Prokosch (1927)). To this group may also be added, for the purposes of the present study, *brōhte* < *bringan*, an originally strong verb that never did have a stem-formative *-i-* in the present system.

Summary: syncope and simplification of consonant clusters occurs in the past tense of weak class I verbs after heavy root syllables in all dialects. It is rarely found in the past of verbs with light root syllables except those with root syllables ending in *-t* or *-d*. It is not found in weak class II (disyllabic) verbs, whether or not with heavy root

[21] Campbell's separates types (vii) and (viii) here as 'long' and 'short ' (i.e. 'heavy' and 'light') respectively. I assume his reason for distinguishing them in this way is that in *-fn-* and *-gl-* sequences he puts the syllable boundary between the two consonants. These forms would otherwise not be strictly light.

syllables. The conditions for syncope therefore appear to be mainly prosodic, segmental conditioning being restricted to dental stems. The behaviour of verbs with a heavy closed syllable before liquid or nasal might suggest that in these cases there are segmental conditions (such as the requirement that a phonotactically illegal cluster not result), but the mixed behaviour of verbs with light closed syllable before liquid or nasal does not support this.

2.3.3 Weak past participle[22].
(i) The ending *-ed* of the past tense of weak class I verbs developed from earlier **-id*.
(ii) The 'rule' is that syncope of *-i-* should occur only in open syllables after heavy root syllables (i.e. in trisyllabic inflected forms where the inflection begins with a vowel), contrast e.g. singular *gecnysed*, plural *gecnysede* with singular *gelǣded*; plural *gelǣdde*, singular nominative *gefylled* with genitive *gefyldes*. In Mercian texts this rule is generally followed.
(iii) In West Saxon and Kentish, syncope with assimilation of consonants tended to be extended to the uninflected forms in past participles with dental stems, e.g. *send* beside *sended*, *gesett* beside *geseted*.
(iv) In Northumbrian, syncope often fails even in the relevant inflected forms, e.g. *gecerredo*, *gefylledo*.
(v) Verbs of class II generally have *-od* or *-ad* corresponding to their form of the past tense. Syncope is resisted.
(vi) In weak class III, *habban*, *secgan, hycgan* and *libban* all show syncope in the past participle (*hycgan* varies) in all dialects except in some late texts (Campbell 1959: §762).
(vii) For verbs with lack of formative *-i-* in the past and past participle from Gmc. see §2.3.2 (ix) above.

Summary: here too the conditions for syncope appear to be mainly prosodic, segmental conditioning being restricted to dental stems. But even here dialectal variation is in evidence.

2.4. Verb syncope in Middle English — received wisdom
'The story of the verb during Middle English is enormously involved, and nearly impossible to tell coherently' (Lass 1992: 125). This assessment includes of course the complexities of the different classes of strong verbs, and the continuing histories of the preterite-present and anomalous verbs that do not concern us here. But there are considerable problems involved in telling a coherent story even for the verbal endings under scrutiny in this study:

> In Middle English the inflectional system of the verb was very complicated because of phonetic changes, the tendency towards the levelling of different forms, and because of a high degree of diversity in the evolution of the same phenomenon in different dialects (Fisiak 1968: §3.17).

The preview of even the small number of contrastive examples cited from the LAEME corpus in §2.2.3.2 above gives some indication of the kind of variation observable in verb syncope in early Middle English. It seems that the system of verb syncope observable in Old English was, at least to a certain extent, restructured

[22] For fuller accounts see, for instance: Campbell (1959: §§751 (3)), Sievers—Brunner (1942: §402), Wright and Wright (1925: §§523, 528, 535).

during the course of the Middle English period as part of a much more radical restructuring of the whole verbal system.

Despite his disclaimer, Lass's (1992: 123–147) account in fact gives a very coherent description of the progression from a verb system that marked two tenses, three moods, and three persons to an emergent system that by the end of the Middle English period is 'actually very like the modern one' (Lass 1992: 138). Kastovsky (1996: 29–30) observes that the restructuring of the verb system between Old English and modern English brings about a radical shift in category distinctions:

> Thus, in Old and Middle English, verbs are grouped into a number of different classes such as "strong", "weak", "preterite-present", "irregular" with various subclasses, while such terms would nowadays be avoided in a strictly synchronic description of Modern English, where we usually find a dichotomy between "regular" and (more or less) "irregular" verbs.

Kastovsky contends that the roots of this restructuring go back to late Old English and Middle English. He also (Kastovsky 1996: 30) points to:

> the Modern English alternations /ɪz/ ~ /z/, /s/ and /ɪd/ ~ /d/, /t/, i.e. the alternation of inflectional allomorphs containing a vowel with vowelless allomorphs and the assimilation of the remaining consonant to the stem-final phoneme. Historically, this alternation resulted from a generalisation of vowel deletion to all environments except to those where it would create a sequence of identical or near identical consonants. Synchronically, however, many linguists now postulate a vowel-insertion rule instead, which obviously implies a switch from vowel deletion to vowel insertion at some point in the history of English...

Clearly, the history of verbal syncope is highly relevant to these remarks and to Kastovsky's more specific observations on the categorial restructuring of the Old English weak verb classes. The present Voyage of Discovery offers (in Tables 7–11 and §2.5) a mass of detailed evidence from texts written between the late 12th and the early 14th century. It is a first step towards a more detailed investigation that should help to throw more light on how the various aspects of the restructuring progressed at an early stage in the process.[23]

For comparative purposes, in what follows I will summarise from the sections on verbal syncope in some of the standard Middle English grammars as I did for Old English in §2.3 above. The grammars vary in the extent to which they give synchronic accounts of the Middle English situation, or describe it in relation to the Old English systems. Mossé's (1952) account seems to take Middle English restructuring for granted, since it makes little reference to syncope in Old English. The accounts given of the developments in the 2nd and 3rd singular present indicative in most standard grammars are deceptively simple. Complications are more readily acknowledged in the developments in the preterite and past participle.

2.4.1 Present tense

For the present indicative, Mossé (1952: §94) gives separate paradigms for North, Midlands and South using the verb *hēre(n)* 'to hear' for exemplification. The relevant forms from his table are: North – 2nd and 3rd sg. *hēres*; Midlands – 2nd sg. *hēres(t)*, 3rd sg. *hēres*, *hēreþ*; South – 2nd sg. *hēr(e)st*, 3rd sg. *hēreþ*. In this account some syncope is thus implied for the South for the 2nd singular, but not for the 3rd singular. In a note Mossé does mention that 'syncopated forms were found in the

[23] I do not propose to undertake such an investigation myself; but the LAEME corpus will soon be available for any who wish to use it.

Southern dialects in the 3rd singular present when the radical ended in a dental *d* or *t*' and gives the examples *bint*, *sent*, *scheot*, *let* etc. But his story is here inadequate; as the present indicative examples in §2.2.3.2 above show, there is observable syncope in these inflections, at least in some text languages, in all phonetic environments in early Middle English, not just in the contracted dental stems.

Wright's (1928: §391) account acknowledges the continuation into Middle English of syncopated and contracted forms from 'West Saxon' in 2nd and 3rd singular present indicative, but only in 'the southern dialects'. But, as we shall see below (Table 7), syncope in these contexts in early Middle English is by no means restricted to the areas corresponding to those where West Saxon was current in Old English. It also occurs in the Midlands, and even in the North, albeit with the northern *-s* ending.

Brunner's (1962: §68) description is superficially fuller, as he lists vowelless inflectional endings beside those with *-e-* for the South, the Midlands and the North (2nd person *-est*, *-st*, North *-es*, *-s*; 3rd person *-eþ*, North *-es*, *-s*, etc.; while in his second note, *-eth*, *-th* are cited as being predominant for the South). But it is not apparent whether these vowelless suffixes indicate presence of general syncope or refer to vowel stems only. One may perhaps assume the latter, because Brunner's only separate reference to syncope (in his third note), states that maintenance of syncope from Old English, specifically in dental stems, was common in the south, but also occurred in the Midlands.

2.4.2 Weak past tense and past participle

Mossé (1952: §§89–92) divides the weak verbs in Middle English into two categories according to whether their preterites ended in *-ed(e)* or or in *-de*, *-te*. The corresponding endings for the past participles would be *-ed* for the first category and *-d* or *-t* for the second. According to this account, into the first category fall (a) Old English weak verbs of class I with originally light root syllable except for roots ending in *-d* or *-t*; (b) most of the Old English weak class II verbs; (c) loan-words 'attracted to this group by phonetic analogy'. Into the second category fall all the other weak verbs, including those like *sēchen* and *tellen* that lacked a vowel in the inflection in Old English, and also including a few French loans attracted into this category such as *agraunt*, *depeynt* (past participles). Mossé also mentions consonant simplification in the roots of verbs in this category, but again little note is made of the variability of the operation of syncope in either category.

Wright's (1928: §§392, 415–432) account is extremely full, throughout using the Old English situation as a reference point and identifying continuations and changes. He deals in detail with the phonological conditions for: (a) (further) simplification of consonant clusters, (b) the shortening of certain long vowels and (c) the devoicing of earlier inflexional *-d(-)*. To summarise he uses *wēred(e)*, *hĕrde*, *tōlde* and *kiste* to represent the four types that continue Old English weak class I verbs (§427). He states (§428) that the Middle English reflexes of Old English weak class II verbs follow the unsyncopated pattern of *wēred(e)* with 'only a small number of verbs' showing syncopated beside unsyncopated forms in the preterite and past participle. He cites *bereft(e)* beside *birēved(e)*; *clepte*, *yclept* beside *clēped(e)*, *yclēped*, *mād*, *ymād*, *ymaad* beside *māked(e)*, *ymāked* and *ypleid* beside *pleied(e)*, *ypleied*. For the verbs of Old English class III that continue in Middle English (§429), viz *haven* (OE *habban*), *liven* (OE *libban*) and *sei(e)n*, *sai(e)n*, *seggen* etc (OE *secgan*) he lists separately the various new formations for preterite and past participle

including a large number of both contracted and uncontracted forms for *haven*. The verbs derived from Anglo-French (§432) almost all follow the unsyncopated pattern except when the stem ended in a heavy vowel or diphthong when syncopated forms could also occur: cf. *crȳde* beside *crȳed(e)*, *preid* beside *preied(e)* etc.

Brunner (1962: §§70–71) gives a condensed but similar story. For class I weak verbs, he describes a continuation of the Old English situation where the weak vowel of the inflection is lost in verbs with heavy stems (*dǣlan*, *dǣlde*; *dēman*, *dēmde*) and in light root syllables ending in *d*, *t*, or *ʒ* (*hreddan*, *hredde*; *lecgan*, *legde*) with devoicing of inflexional *d* after voiceless consonants (*settan*, *sette*; *cyssan*, *cyste*; *cēpan*, *cēpte* (where the stem vowel later shortened)). He points out (in his third note to §70) that the change of *d* to *t* tends to spread in Middle English to voiced consonant contexts: (a) with *nd*, *ld* and *rd* — *sent(e)*, *went(e)*, *gilt(e)*; (b) after heavy root syllables before *m*, *n*, *l, r*, or *v* with accompanying shortening of the vowel —*delt(e)*, *demt(e)*, *brent(e)*, *left(e)*; (c) sometimes even with class II verbs and French loans — *cleft(e)*, *lost(e)*, *spoilt(e)*. He also points out that in the past participle in Old English, syncope only occurred in inflected forms of heavy-stemmed verbs, whereas in Middle English the syncope was usually extended to the uninflected forms also: *isett*, *ileid*, *iherd*. Those class I verbs lacking a connecting vowel in preterite and past participle in Old English continued as syncopated forms into Middle English by normal development. For class II weak verbs in general the inflectional vowel is regularly retained as *-e-*. Brunner makes no special mention of preterite and past participle forms for Old English class III weak verbs. For French loans, he differentiates between vowel stems that join class I, and consonant stems that join class II and have no syncope, at least early in the South. In the North, and later in the South (after the loss of distinctive class II endings), these too fall in with class I. The verb *cacche(n)* however has *caught* in preterite and past participle, falling in with the Old English *læccean*-type.

2.5 Results

2.5.1 Orientation

Against the background of what is already acknowledged as a complex situation, the LAEME corpus of tagged texts can provide detailed evidence from an early stage in what is only later observable as radical restructuring. The specification of different verb classes, and especially of different stem final elements, within the tags themselves facilitate retrieval and comparability.

The data are sorted by filename and by broad geographical area as in Tables 5 and 6. In this paper, there is not room to go into the detail of variation in specific verbs within the stem classes marked. Identification of the manuscripts, texts and text samples from which the following data are derived may be found (via the relevant filename listed in Table 6) in the Index of Sources on the LAEME website. The texts are very uneven in length, and the number of words in each sample is there given, as well as the text language's localisation (by National Grid reference and by county), either where the local origins are known, or if the language has been fitted. There are considerable gaps in the early Middle English dialect continuum because of unevenness of text survival. If a county is not named it can be assumed that no early Middle English material has so far been localised for that county in LAEME.[24]

[24] For these and more details about each text sample see http://www.lel.ed.ac.uk/ihd/laeme/laeme.html (Auxiliary Data Sets, Index of Sources).

Table 5

Data labelled	*are from texts localised in*
N	Cumbria, Durham, Yorks, Lancs
NWML	Cheshire, Staffs
CML	Leics, Warwicks, Northants (except Soke of Peterborough)
EML	Lincs, Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambs (incl. the Isle of Ely) Hunts, Soke of Peterborough
SWML	S Salop, Herefords, Worcs, Gloucs
SW	Devon, Dorset, Wilts, Somerset
SC	Oxon, Berks, Hants
Ess&Lon	Essex, London
SE	Kent, Sussex, Surrey

Table 6: Key to Tables 7–11

Texts (by number and filename) associated with regions

N:
1. beverleyt.tag
2. bodley26t.tag
3. candet4t.tag
4. cotcleoBvit.tag
5. cotfaustat.tag
6. cotfaustbt.tag
7. cotvespcmat.tag
8. edincmat.tag
9. edincmbt.tag
10. edincmct.tag
11. gospatrict.tag
12. scotwart.tag
[12 text languages]

NWML:
13. hat26tct.tag
14. lam499t.tag
15. tanner169t.tag
16. titusart.tag
17. tituswoht.tag
[5 text languages]

CML:
18. bodley57t.tag
19. coventryt.tag
20. maidspat.tag
[3 text languages]

EML:
21. arundel248t.tag
22. arundel292vvt.tag
23. ashmole360t.tag
24. bardneyt.tag,
25. benetholmet.tag
26. bestiaryt.tag
27. buryFft.tag
28. candet3t.tag
29. clericot.tag,
30. culhht.tag
31. dulwicht.tag
32. genexodt.tag
33. hale135t.tag
34. havelokt.tag
35. laud108bt.tag
36. merton248t.tag
37. ormt.tag
38. petchront.tag
39. ramseyat.tag,
40. ramseybt.tag
41. ramseycott.tag
42. royal12e1at.tag
43. royal12e1bt.tag
44. tencmFft.tag
45. thorneykt.tag
46. thorneymt.tag
47. trhomBt.tag
48. trincleoDt.tag
[28 text languages]

SWML:
49. adde6bt.tag
50. bod34t.tag
51. caiusart.tag
52. cccc8t.tag
53. ccco59t.tag
54. cleoarat.tag
55. cleoarbt.tag
56. corpart.tag
57. cotowlat.tag
58. cotowlbt.tag
59. digby86mapt.tag
60. egpm1t.tag
61. egpm2t.tag
62. egsomert.tag
63. fmcpmt.tag
64. iacobt.tag
65. jes29t.tag
66. lamhomA1t.tag
67. lamhomA2t.tag
68. lampmt.tag
69. lamursnt.tag
70. layamonAat.tag
71. layamonAbt.tag
72. neroart.tag
73. nerowgt.tag
74. royalkgat.tag
75. royalkgbt.tag
76. royalkgct.tag
77. swinfieldt.tag
78. tr323at.tag
79/ tr323bt.tag
80. tr323ct.tag
81. tr323dt.tag
82. vitelld3t.tag
83. worcdoct.tag
84. worcsermont.tag
85. worcthcreedt.tag
86. worcthfragst.tag
87. worcthgrglt.tag
[39 text languages]

SW:
88. aberdeent.tag
89. creditonat.tag
90. creditonbt.tag
91. emmanuel27t.tag
92, layamonBOt.tag
93. royal2f8t.tag
94. salisbury82t.tag
95. sherbornet.tag
96. wellsat.tag
97. wellsbt.tag
[10 text languages]

SC:
98. add27909t.tag
99. corp145selt.tag
100. cuckoot.tag
101. laud108at.tag
102. trhom34ct.tag
103. winchestert.tag
104. wintneyt.tag
[7 text languages]

Ess & Lon:
105. adde6at.tag
106. adde6ct.tag
107. blicklingt.tag
108. huntproct.tag
109. prisprayt.tag
110. trhomAt.tag
111. trinpmt.tag
112. vvat.tag
113. vvbt.tag
114. vvcorrt.tag
115. vvtit.tag
[11 text languages]

SE:
116. ayenbitet.tag
117. chertseyt.tag
118. digpmt.tag
119. laud471kst.tag
120. maidsdwct.tag
[5 text languages]

N = North; NWML = North-West Midlands; CML = Central Midlands; EML = East Midlands; SWML = South-West Midlands; SW = South-West; SC = South Central; Ess&Lon = Essex and London; SE = South-East.

Note that in Table 6, the consecutive numbers assigned to the tagged texts (by geographical area and by alphabetical order of filename within that area) are for reference *in this chapter only*. They do not match the random index numbers given to these tagged texts in LAEME. For reasons of space, data from 47 unlocalised texts are not included here. The full data sets from those texts that have been localised is listed in Tables 7–11 in the Appendix. It is obvious that the level of detail obtained by the LAEME method of flagging will make for very complex analysis. Below I make some brief preliminary observations on the results.

2.5.2 Caveats

2.5.2.1 Things done but not implemented here

For the purposes of this chapter, I have amalgamated some categories which the LAEME flagging would allow to be presented separately:

(a) In the LAEME corpus of tagged texts all words or tagged elements appearing in rhyme position are identified with the flag {rh} at the end of the grammel. This obviously applies to any of the verbal forms in this study that are used as rhymes. Ideally, such forms should have been noted separately in Tables 7, 10 and 11, but this would have greatly increased the complexity and the size of the Tables. They could have been omitted, but given the high proportion of verse texts in the corpus, omission would cause considerable loss of data. As far as syncope is concerned, moreover, constraints of metre could have as much influence over choice of verb form as rhyme. All data from verse texts should perhaps have been treated separately from that of prose texts. The LAEME Index of Sources (see n. **22** above) makes it possible to identify which texts are verse and which prose.

(b) When past participles are used attributively, they are given the flag -aj in the LAEME corpus.[25] For the past participle data in Table 11, it would have been possible to record such instances separately, but preliminary inspection suggests that this syntactic distinction has little or no bearing on syncope.

2.5.2.2 Things left undone

The flagging of stem final categories was done primarily in order to ensure that hived-off verb endings were compared only like with like. There are some points of comparison that the present level of flagging therefore does not enable:

(a) The 3rd singular present indicative verbs in dental stems where the ending has been assimilated are marked -ct. For the history of verbal syncope, it would be desirable to compare the numbers and distributions of contracted forms with uncontracted forms of 3rd singular dental stems. However, uncontracted forms have not been given the necessary [D] flag because their endings were deemed to be strictly comparable with other endings in the default category. Table 8 shows presence and distribution of contracted 3rd singular dental stems. It would be necessary to identify and flag the uncontracted ones in the corpus before direct comparison could be made either with the contracted ones or with the material on second person dental stems recorded in the final column of Table 7.

[25] See further Laing and Lass (forthc. Introduction chapter 4, §4.4.4.8 (d)).

(b) For the 2nd and 3rd singular present indicative, I have not specified whether hived-off endings are from weak or from strong verbs. Information about differentiation in syncope between weak and strong verbs noted for Old English noted in §2.3.1 (v) above is therefore not directly recoverable for early Middle English from the LAEME flagging. To access this information one would have to check individual lexels and then refer to dictionaries or to the corpus of etymologies as necessary.

(c) Dental stems where the ending has been assimilated in forms of the past tense and past participle, and where there is therefore no ending to be hived off, have so far been given no flags other than the relevant basic lexel and grammel. Information about such verb forms does not therefore appear in Tables 10 and 11.

(d) In defining the stem final I have used only the last consonant; the flagging does not therefore differentiate between single consonants and clusters (see n. **13**). This means that it is impossible in such cases to identify stem-weight from the hived-off inflection. It has been shown that syllable weight affects the operation of syncope (§2.3.1 (vii), §2.3.2 (vii) and cf. Lass 1994: §4.3.2). Further flagging to indicate stem final clusters would facilitate a more detailed exploration in early Middle English of a story that goes back to early Germanic.

2.5.2.3 The (in)significance of Table 9

This is a simple listing of instances of zero endings in the present indicative 3rd singular appearing in texts in the LAEME corpus. Zero endings also occur infrequently in the past system. It is not clear whether such relatively rare forms are the result of syncope followed by apocope of the last consonant, or whether the whole ending has been deleted in a single operation. In other words it is not knowable whether this phenomenon is primarily phonological or lexical-morphological. What is clear is that velar environments predominate.

2.5.2.4 Actual spellings

In Tables 7, 10 and 11 there is no room to record actual spellings of the material that may or may not be subject to syncope. Presence or absence of syncope only is noted. To recover the actual vowels and consonants used in the endings, including whether or not thematic *-i-* has been retained in present tense class II forms it would be necessary to go to the individual text dictionaries from which the information in the tables has been derived.

2.5.2.5 The last three columns of the main data field[26]

In tables 7, 10 and 11, the material in the columns headed '<f>', '<w, p>' and '[j]' has to be interpreted in the context of the explanations given in notes **14–16** above. The paucity of information recorded reflects the fact that the triggering environments are only present in a small number of forms and texts. These will require individual treatment before further insights (if any) can be gained.

It must be remembered that for any one verb the stem final need not be the same for every token — whether from region to region, text language to text language, or even within a text language. Verbs with stem final <w, p> may through

[26] In Table 7 they are not the last, but are the three immediately preceding the last column (containing information about the second person singular dental stems).

vocalisation become vowel stems. Verbs with [j] stems may show earlier [x] or sporadic [k, g], or later vocalisation.[27]

In the '[j]' column it is noticeable that examples in originally Weak Class II verbs predominate. These survivals from Weak Class II are marked by sequences of the type -EGE-, -EgE- or -EzE- (e.g. MINEg+EDE WARNED, SENEG+Ed SINS) in verbs which in Old English had at least variant forms in *-igian/-egian*. The examples above are from $mynegian and $sin (< OE **synegian* (< **sunig-ōjan*) beside *syngan*) respectively. $sin (along with its derivative $forsin) is by far the commonest verb of this type in the LAEME corpus, and it turns out that its forms are almost categorically of the kind showing such a historically disyllabic stem.[28] The following, however, also appear: $bebloody and $bloody (< OE *(be)blōdegian*), $dysegian ACT FOOLISHLY, $empty (< OE *ēmtigian*), $hefigian BECOME HEAVY, $mo:dian (< OE *mōdig(i)an* BECOME PROUD), $tintregian TORMENT, $weary (< OE *w ērigian*), $wi:tigian (< OE *wītigian*, *wītegian* PROPHESY). In some texts the disyllabic stem type has sporadically been transferred to Weak Class II verbs with monosyllabic stems, e.g. $harrow (< OE *hergian* e.g. HEREG+EDE 3rd sg past ind); $li:Yian (< OE *līþian* SOFTEN e.g. I+LIdEG+Ad LIy+EGAd 3rd sg pres ind and LIdEG+EDDE 3rd sg past ind); $mae:Yian (< OE *mǣþian* RESPECT e.g. MEdEG+Ed 3rd sg pres ind MEdEG+ED past participle); $tithe (< OE *tīþian* e.g. I+TEOHEd+ET, I+TEOyEG+ED past participle); $wake (< OE *wacian* WAKE e.g. wAKEG+ED, wAKEG+Ed 3rd sg pres ind); $weorYian (< OE *weorþian* HONOUR e.g. I+wURdEG+EDE past participle); $wildian (cf. OE *awildian* GO WILD e.g. I+wILEg+Ed[29] past participle).

2.5.2.6 The [x] column in Tables 10 and 11

The vast majority of athematic (syncopated) forms in this column in the past system reflect not a deletion contemporaneous with the syncope whose story is told in the other columns but rather a failure of a certain class of verbs in proto-Germanic to become thematic (§2.3.2 (ix) above). In creating the LAEME corpus I have been both a tagger and a historian. In this instance the role of tagger has taken precedence over the historian's knowledge that these forms are surface comparable but not time comparable. Any assessment of the numbers of syncopated versus unsyncopated forms in this column in Tables 10 and 11 must be made in the light of further investigation of the actual verbal forms involved and of their etymologies.

2.5.3 Some preliminary observations on the main data field

It is obvious that some areas are ill-supplied with texts and those that are available may be very short. There is therefore very little material recorded in the tables for the Central Midlands and not much also for the South West or for South Central. Note that some of the discrepancies in the amount of data recorded for particular texts

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[27] Moreover, some verbs with older stem alternants may generalise one alternant to the entire paradigm: e.g. SAY which may have all [dʒ] SEGG-type or all dipthongs in *-i* SEI-type.

[28] There are some early examples of stems in monosyllabic *sung-* in the South-West Midlands. The very few examples in the corpus showing monosyllabic *sin(n)-*, with only the root before the verbal inflection, are confined to northern or north-east midland texts post 1300, apart from a single example of SINEDE 3rd sg past indicative from hand B of the Trinity Homilies.

[29] Deletion of the second coronal in a two member cluster occurs elsewhere in early Middle English; the original root here is *wild-*.

between the tables are because of differences in text genre. There will be much lower representation of past tense forms in instructional or homiletic texts and conversely little representation of present tense forms in narratives.

There is no space in this chapter to give an exhaustive analysis of the mass of material presented in Tables 7, 10 and 11. Below are a few examples of what appear to be salient phenomena that indicate the likely profitability of further investigation.

2.5.3.1 Relation of the main data field to the received wisdom

The handbooks tell us that the main conditioning factors for syncope in Middle English are the weight of the stem, historical class membership and region. I have not, in this study, for reasons discussed above (§2.5.2.2 (d)), taken stem weight into consideration. This remains to be explored within the LAEME framework. Class membership and regional origin have been taken into account, and the results partly support and partly challenge the handbook consensus. Thus broad phonological conditioning, an element of morphology and geolinguistic factors have been examined both by the handbooks and by this study. What has not, however, been explored in the handbooks is the role played by the phonetic properties of segment final consonants in the conditioning of syncope. This study shows that there is a strong element of such conditioning, different from region to region.

(a) Morphological factors

(i) The K2 divide

Tables 7, 10 and 11 very strongly bear out the received wisdom that verbs that were weak class II in Old English only very rarely show syncope in present or past systems. In early Middle English, there is very little evidence available for verbs originating in French. What little there is indicates that for the most part they follow the class II pattern. Variable exceptions observable in the tables must be investigated individually. The one notable exception, which regularly shows syncope in the past system (as has been observed in the handbooks), is the verb CATCH (< OF *cachier*) which has been reinterpreted as belonging to the [x]-final type like TEACH.

There are also some sporadic exceptions in class II verbs, where syncope is observable in the tables. In most of these cases it is clear not only that the examples are confined to particular texts, but to particular lexemes as well. For instance, in Table 7 in column [r] the entry for text 37 (*The Ormulum*) has 28 examples of syncopation in the K2 category. It turns out that these are all in the reflex of OE *byrian* BEHOVE. These and similar examples elsewhere in the tables strongly suggest by their lexical specificity the beginnings of diffusion.[30]

(ii) Tense differentials 1: present and past

In the analysis in this and the following section I ignore the French and K2 data.

In both present and past systems the 'default unmarked' column shows general lack of syncope and the 'vowel' column general syncope. In the 'sibilant', 'velar stop' and [p] columns there is not enough recorded data to make general

[30] In Table 10 in the [s] column the entry for text 99 (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 145, *South English Legendary*) has 15 examples of syncopation in the K2 category. It turns out that these are all in the verb ASK and are in the form ESSTE. It is possible that such a form goes back to an OE **ācscan* (cf. the noun *ācsce* QUESTION) rather than *āscian*. If such be the case one would have to remove this example from K2 and reclassify it as the reflex of a class I weak verb. The detailed nature of the LAEME tagging allows such anomalies to surface and to be subject to debate.

comments about differences between present and past systems. There are however marked differences between them in the 'nasal', '[r]' and '[l]' (i.e. final sonorant) columns. It is clear that syncope in these categories is largely absent in the present system except in SC, Ess&Lon and SE. In the past system there is evidence of syncope in both past tense and past participle in all regions in these categories.

(iii) Tense differentials 2: past tense and past participle
In the 'default unmarked' column there is in general little observable syncope and very little difference between past and past participle except in SWML where the past tense shows more syncope than is observable in in the past participle.

In the 'vowel' column there is general syncope across all regions. However it is clear that there is some degree of mixture in the past participle in NWML, EML, SWML and Ess&Lon where lack of syncope is observable as a minority phenomenon. This is not the case in the past tense.

In the 'nasal', '[r]' and '[l]' columns there is more evidence of syncope in both past tense and past participle than there is in the default column. But it is evident that there is less syncope in the past participle than in the past tense. The [x] column shows full syncope in all recorded regions (except in verbs that have [x] by devoicing) as would be expected historically (see §2.5.2.5 above). There is too little data recorded for the 'velar stop', 'sibilant' and '[p]' columns to draw any firm conclusions, but the fuller information recorded for 'sibilant' in the SWML shows a similar pattern of less syncope in the past participle than in the past tense.

The material in (ii) and (iii) strongly suggests that syncope is not a single unitary process. Rather, at least in the early stages, syncope in different morphological as well as phonological classes followed separate and idiosyncratic pathways.

(b) Phonological factors — the role of stem finals
There is no room here for detailed assessment of the extent to which the LAEME flagging for stem final consonants can give insights into the phonetic conditioning of syncope. However it is clear that sonorant finals, particularly in the past system, conduce to syncope.

(c) Regional differentia
The strongest differential for syncope is regional. Even in the present system, where syncope is more restricted than in the past system, it is categorical in the SE, and very strong in Ess&Lon and SC. There is also evidence in the present system in the '[x]', 'velar stop' and 'sibilant' columns of some degree of syncope in SWML and even in EML and in the [r] column in N. In the past system, syncope is geographically much more widespread, being present at least as a minority phenomenon for many categories even in N and NWML as well as further south (see above).

One further minor observation that might be worth further investigation is that in N, where syncope is generally resisted, in those categories where it does occur, it may unusually also occur in K2 verbs in that same category. This suggests an early beginning to the conflation of verb paradigms in the North.

3. Conclusions

It will be apparent that all the 2nd and 3rd person present indicative, weak past tense and weak past participle verbal forms from 120 different tagged texts comprises an

enormous amount of data. Isolating and sorting them is a highly complex procedure. There is enough material here for a book-sized work, and certainly too much for an illustrative chapter. The LAEME tagging method of flagging the separated endings for stem final consonants illustrates one revealing method of starting the sorting process. It does not yet, however, take into account whether a root syllable is heavy or light, nor even whether a particular verbal stem ends in a consonant cluster. The data as presented in the tables may therefore be potentially misleading. No researcher should use the information on its own to make more than very general statements. It should be used in conjunction with more targeted searches of the LAEME corpus and further sorting. This second stage analysis must be done as a separate exercise, but is eminently possible with the publication of LAEME and open access to the tagged texts. What is presented here is a preliminary heuristic guide to what could develop into a research project on a much larger scale. The Mystery Bus has not yet reached its terminus.

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