The background of the slide features a detailed, high-resolution image of blue marbled paper. The pattern consists of intricate, organic swirls and ripples in various shades of blue, from light sky blue to deep navy, creating a textured, liquid-like appearance.

Impersonal modals in Middle English

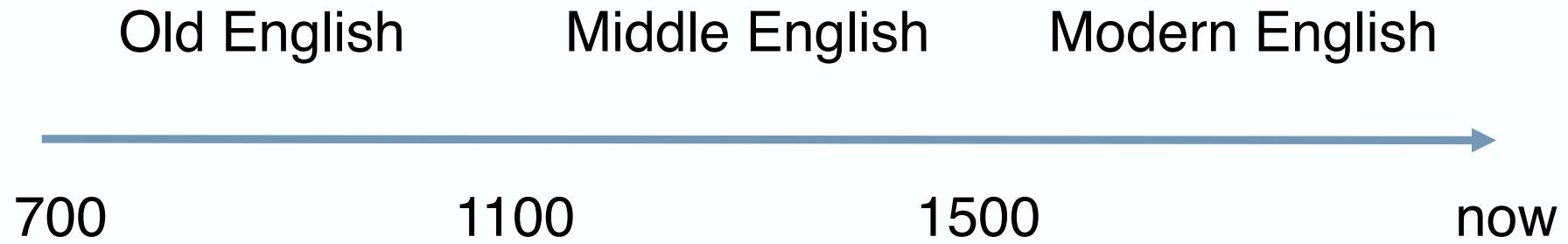
Sune Gregersen

11th T.W.I.S.T. Student Conference for Linguistics

Universiteit Leiden, 21 Apr 2017

‘The lady doth protest too much methinks’

Hamlet, III.ii.211



Plan for today

1. Old English impersonals
2. The demise of the impersonal
3. The case of *ought*
4. Future work

Old English impersonals

Case in Old English

	'the fish'	3SG.MASC.PRON
NOM	<i>se fisc</i>	<i>he</i>
ACC	<i>bone fisc</i>	<i>hine</i>
GEN	<i>bæs fisces</i>	<i>his</i>
DAT	<i>bam fisce</i>	<i>him</i>

Old English clause types (1)

Intransitive clause

NOM VERB

Old English clause types (1)

Intransitive clause

NOM VERB

Transitive clause

NOM VERB {Acc, GEN, DAT}
NOM VERB COMPCL

Old English clause types (2)

'Impersonal' clause

DAT VERB

DAT VERB {Acc, GEN, NOM}

DAT VERB COMPCL

ofhreowan ‘pity’

(1) Old English, 9th/10th c.

<i>him</i>	<i>ofhreow</i>	<i>bæs</i>	<i>mannes</i>
him.DAT	pitied.3SG	the.GEN	man.GEN
‘he pitied the man’			

DOE Corpus: ÆCHom I, 13, 4

mætan ‘dream’

(2) Old English, 11th c.

<i>Æfter</i>	<i>twam</i>	<i>gearum</i>	<i>faraone</i>	<i>mætte</i>	<i>bæt</i>
after	two.DAT	years.DAT	pharao.DAT	dreamt.3SG	COMP
<i>he</i>	<i>stode</i>	<i>be</i>	<i>anre</i>	<i>ea</i>	
he.NOM	stood.3SG.SBJ	by	a.DAT	river	

‘After two years Pharao dreamt that he was standing by a river’

DOE Corpus: Gen (Ker), 106

Semantic fields

Elmer (1981)

RUE

PLEASE

BEHOVE

HAPPEN

SEEM

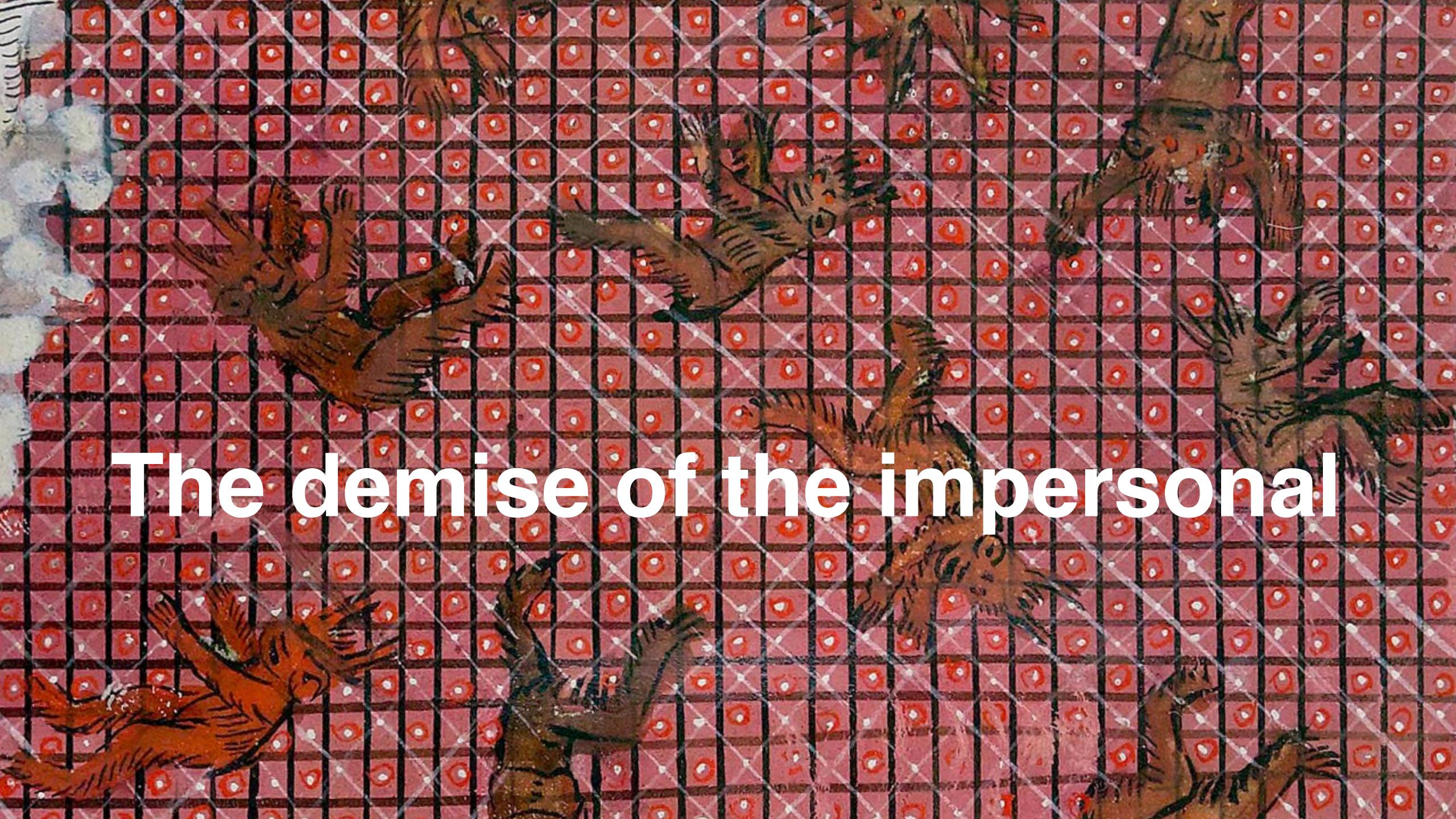
Semantic fields

Elmer (1981)

RUE
PLEASE
BEHOVE
HAPPEN
SEEM

Möhlig-Falke (2012)

PHYSICAL SENSATION
EMOTION
COGNITION
EXISTENTIAL EXPERIENCE
MOTION
OWNERSHIP/APPROPRIATENESS
(NON)AVAILABILITY
BENEFACTION



The demise of the impersonal

Anglistische Forschungen

Herausgegeben von Dr. Johannes Hoops

Professor an der Universität Heidelberg

Heft 14

The Transition from the Impersonal to the Personal Construction in Middle English

by

W. van der Gaaf



Heidelberg

Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung

1904

Work on impersonals

Van der Gaaf (1904)

Work on impersonals

Van der Gaaf (1904)

Jespersen (1927)

Work on impersonals

Van der Gaaf (1904)

Jespersen (1927)

Elmer (1981)

Fischer & van der Leek (1983; 1987)

Anderson (1986)

Allen (1995; 1997)

Möhlig-Falke (2012)

Miura (2015)

like with DAT

(3) Old English, 10th c.?

Dam wife ba word wel licodon
the.DAT woman.DAT those.NOM words.NOM well pleased.3PL

‘Those words pleased the woman very much’

DOE Corpus: Beo, 174

like with caseless noun

(4) Middle English, 13th/14th c.

Ille liked ðanne balaac / Euerilc word ðe prest balaam spac.

'And every word that Balaam the priest spoke displeased Balak'

MED: a1325(c1250) *Gen.& Ex.(Corp-C 444)* 4029

like with NOM

(5) Middle English, late 14th c.

He made me lopen þat þat i most lyked.

'He made me loathe that which I liked the most'

MED: c1390 ?Hilton *Qui Habitat* (Vrn) 8/7

However: *like* with DAT until 1500

(6) Middle English, 15th c.

He doth all that hym lyketh.

‘He does everything that he likes’

MED: a1500(?c1450) *Merlin* (Cmb Ff.3.11) 1

Subject-like behaviour

(7) Modern Icelandic

*Henni svelgdist á steikinni {sinni / *hennar}*
she.DAT choked.3SG on steak.DEF.DAT {REFL / *POSS.3SG.FEM}
'She choked on her steak'

Cole et al. (1980: 724), quoted from Anderson (1977)

Subject-like behaviour

(8) Old Georgian

<i>me</i>	<i>m-i-qvar-an</i>	<i>isini</i>
1SG.DAT	1SG-APPL-love-PL	3PL.NOM
'I love them'		

Cole et al. (1980: 739), cited from Tschenkeli (1958: 454)

Subject-like behaviour

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Subject-like behaviour

(9) Modern Georgian

mat Ø-u-qvar-t is
3PL.DAT 3-APPL-love-PL 3SG.NOM

‘They love him/her/it’

Cole et al. (1980: 740), cited from Tschenkeli (1958: 454)

Subject-like behaviour

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Non-canonical agreement in Chaucer?

(10) Middle English, 14th c.

*And seyde to hem in a goodly manere how that hem oghten haue greet
repentance*

‘And [she] explained to them in a gracious manner how they ought to have
great repentance’

Chaucer, *Tale of Melibee* (ed. Blake, I. 1731)

Innsbruck Corpus: MELBLA, Hengwrt MS

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Loss of impersonals

1. Loss of the verb

me listeth, me meteth

2. Addition of formal subject

me seemeth > it seems (to me)

3. Dative experiencer > nominative subject

me liketh > I like

4. Use of passive

me shameth > I am ashamed

The case of *ought*

Sources of new impersonals

	<i>n</i>	Examples
Old English (inherited)	31	<i>gladen, ofdreden</i>
Middle English (new formations)	9	<i>happenen, misteren</i>
Old Norse	7	<i>irken, semen</i>
Norman French	16	<i>chauncen, merveillien</i>

Source: Möhlig-Falke (2012: 15)

Impersonal necessity verbs

Old English

DAT *gedafenian*

DAT *gebyrian*

DAT *gerisan*

Middle English

(DAT *bir*)

DAT *behave*

DAT *must*

DAT *ought*

DAT *tharf*

Impersonal *must*

(11) Middle English, 15th c.

him must be vp be tyme to goo on huntyng

‘he must be up in time to go hunting’

MED: c1460 *Ipom.*(3) (Lngl 257) 345/14

Impersonal *ought*

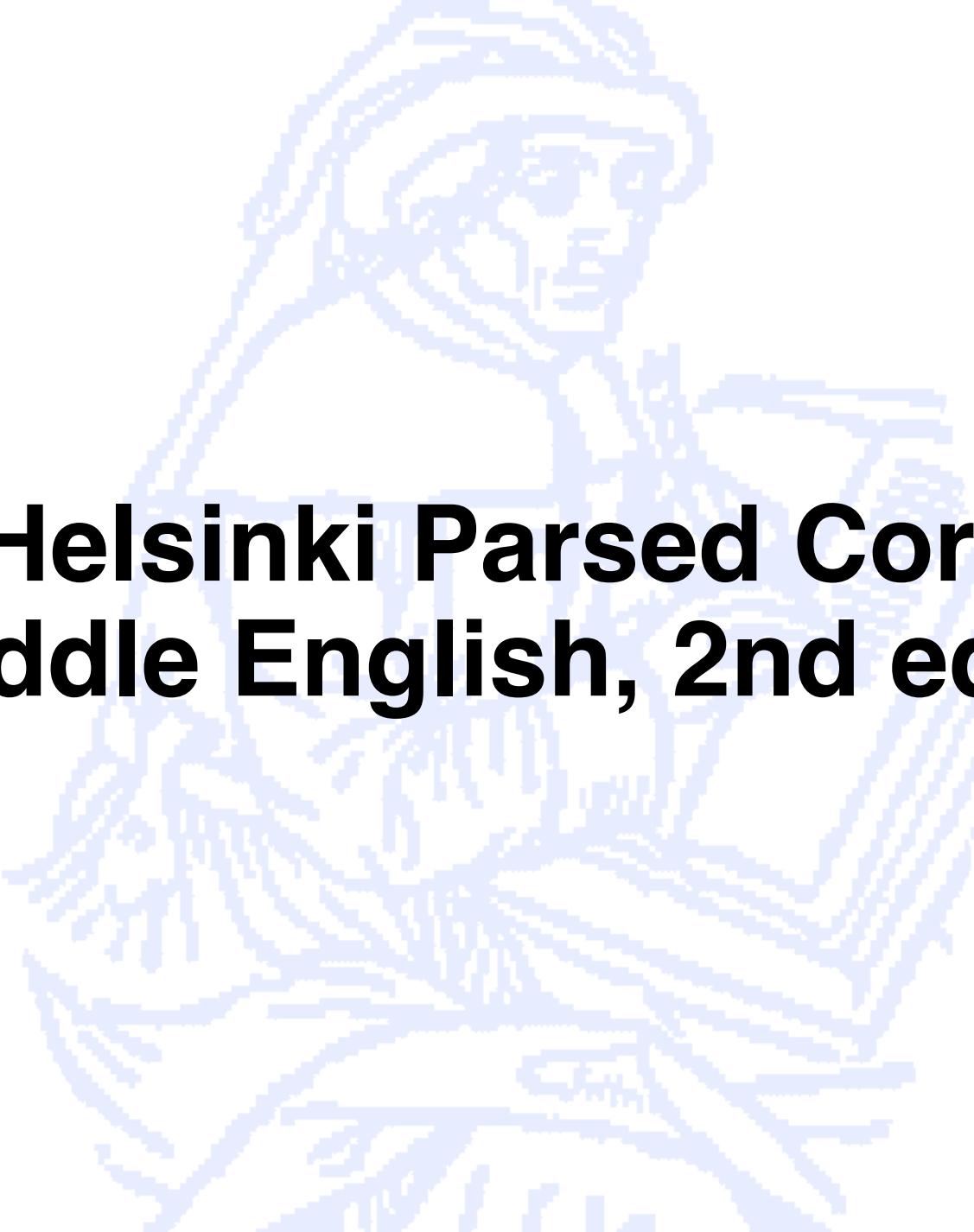
(12) Middle English, 15th c.

Me awghte to knowe þe Kynge: he es my kydde lorde
‘I ought to know the king; he is my noble lord’

CMEPV: *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, l. 3509 (Thornton MS.)

‘The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries may, with regard to English syntax, be called a period of confusion [...] the language was in an unsettled state [...] mistakes were occasionally made’

Van der Gaaf (1904: 143)



Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English, 2nd edn.



CorpusSearch 2: a tool for linguistic research

CorpusSearch 2 is a Java program that supports research in corpus linguistics. It is useful both for the construction of syntactically annotated (parsed) corpora and for searching them. Running CorpusSearch on an appropriately annotated corpus a user can automatically:

- find and count lexical and syntactic configurations of any complexity
- correct systematic errors
- code the linguistic features of corpus sentences for later statistical analysis

CorpusSearch 2

Both the input and output files of CorpusSearch are ordinary text files, with syntactic annotations in the [Penn-Treebank format](#).

CorpusSearch 2 runs under any Java-supported operating system, including Linux, Macintosh, Unix and Windows. It requires Java 2, version 1.3 or later. In addition to being downloadable from this site, CorpusSearch is distributed with the [Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpora of Historical English](#).

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Last modified: Fri Nov 20 13:37:00 EST 2009

SOURCEFORGE.NET

(13) Middle English, c. 1400

and þe Britons were cristen: wel auȝt him þan ham forto helpe, so as þai weren of on law

‘and the Britons were Christians; so he ought to help them, since they were of the same law [faith]’

PPCME2: CMBRUT3, 942.839 (CMEPV: *The Brut*)

(13) Middle English, c. 1400

*and þe Britons were cristen: wel **auȝt him** þan ham forto helpe, so as þai
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(14) Middle English, early 15th c.

Right wel aughte vs for to loue & worscipe to drede & serue such a lord
‘We really ought to love and worship, fear and worship such a lord’

PPCME2: CMMANDEV, 2.24 (CMEPV: *Mandeville’s Travels*)

(14) Middle English, early 15th c.

*Right wel **aughte vs** for to loue & worscipe to drede & serue such a lord*

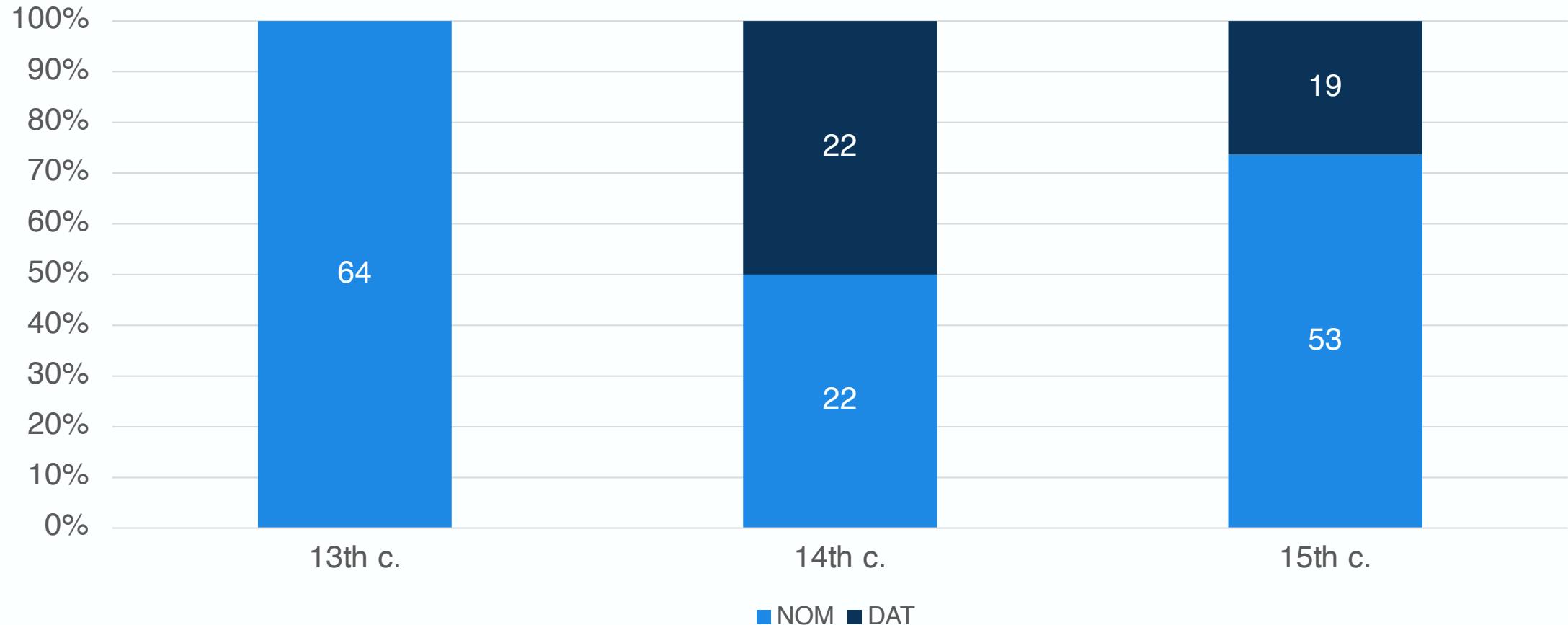
'We really ought to love and worship, fear and worship such a lord'

PPCME2: CMMANDEV, 2.24 (CMEPV: *Mandeville's Travels*)

PPCME2 – case per century

	Wordcount	[NOM <i>ought</i>]	[DAT <i>ought</i>]	% DAT
13th century	199,149	64	0	0%
14th century	378,517	22	22	50%
15th century	527,986	53	19	26.4%

[DAT *ought*] per century



PPCME2 – 14th century

Text	[NOM <i>ought</i>]	[DAT <i>ought</i>]
CMAELR3	2	
CMBRUT3	1	3
CMCTMELI	6	8
CMCTPARS	3	11
CMPURVEY	10	

PPCME2 – 15th century

Text	[NOM <i>ought</i>]	[DAT <i>ought</i>]	Text	[NOM <i>ought</i>]	[DAT <i>ought</i>]
CMAELR4	2		CMMALORY	16	1
CMBENRUL	15		CMMANDEV	2	1
CMBOETH	2		CMMIRK	1	
CMEDTHOR	2	4	CMREYNAR	3	
CMGAYTRY		9	CMROLLEP	1	1
CMJULNOR	1		CMROLLTR	2	3
CMKEMPE	4	1	CMROYAL	1	

Summing up

1. Non-nominative subject marking ('impersonals') a cross-linguistically common phenomenon

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2. Loss of impersonals in Middle English a drawn-out process with 'bumps in the road'

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Summing up

1. Non-nominative subject marking ('impersonals') a cross-linguistically common phenomenon
2. Loss of impersonals in Middle English a drawn-out process with 'bumps in the road'
3. The pattern *me ought* etc. develops in the 14th century
4. Unexplained in-text variation

Future work



In-text variation

(15) Middle English, 14th c.

- a. *I moste trette of a trew towchande bise nedes*
‘I must necessarily negotiate a truth concerning this’
CMEPV: *Alliterative Morte Arthure* (Thornton MS.), l. 263

- b. *Vs moste with some fresche mette refresche oure pople*
‘We must revitalise our people with some fresh food’
ibid., l. 2491

Analogy in necessity verbs?

Old English

DAT *gedafenian*

DAT *gebyrian*

DAT *gerisan*

Middle English

(DAT *bir*)

DAT *behave*

DAT *must*

DAT *ought*

DAT *tharf*

Old Norse ‘impersonals’

(16) Old Norse (Iceland, 13th c.)

vilja mundu goðin at þenna ás
want would.3PL gods.DEF COMP this.M.ACC ás (type of god)

þyrfti eigi at nefna
was.necessary.SBJ not to mention

‘the gods would wish that it was not necessary to mention this ás’

Gylfaginning 28, Codex Regius (GKS 2365 4°)

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Illustrations

Slide 1: BnF, Latin 1429, fol. 8r (16th c.)
Slide 5: BnF, Latin 8878, fol. 139v (11th c.)
Slide 14: BnF, Français 316, fol. 23v (14th c.)
Slide 31: Huntington Library, HM 144, fol. 81r
(15th c.)
Slide 51: BL, Royal 18 E III, fol. 24r (12th c.)
Slide 58: BnF, Français 616, fol. 24v (15th c.)

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Thank you!