

# *Dare* and the ‘degrammaticalization’ debate – reappraising the evidence

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Amsterdam Center for Language and Communication



# PhD project

“De-auxiliarization in the Dutch  
and English modals: A comparative  
diachronic corpus investigation”



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# *Dare* in Present-Day English

- Variable inflection                    *s/he dare vs. s/he dares*
- Variable infinitive                  *dare go vs. dare to go*
- Variable *do*-support                *dare not vs. don't dare*
- Transitive use                        *I dare you etc.*

Cf. e.g. Quirk et al. (1985: 138f)

# *Dare* in Present-Day English

- (1) *so this means you daren't give him anything now*

BNC (1993, S\_meeting)

- (2) *the draftsman did not dare to risk such Kafkaesque accuracy*

BNC (1990, W\_ac\_polit\_law\_edu)

- (3) *she moved over to the wall, where a sofa seemed to dare her to sit on it*

BNC (1993, W\_fict\_prose)

# *Dare* in Present-Day English

‘marginal modal’

Quirk et al. (1985: 138)

‘marginal auxiliary’

Biber et al. (1999: 484)

modal and lexical verb; ‘blurring’ of auxiliary/lexical distinction

Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 109f)

‘modal and full verb constructions’

Warner (1993: 42)

# *Dearr* in Old English

- (4) *Moyses hydde hys nebb; he ne dorste beseon ongean God*  
‘Moses hid his face; he didn’t dare to look at God’

DOE Corpus (Exod, 3.6)

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- (5) *Hwa dear nu gedyrstlæcan, þæt he derige*  
who dares now dare [?] that he harms.SBJ

*þam folce*  
that.D people.D

‘Who would now dare to harm these people’ (Beths 1999)

DOE Corpus (ÆHomM 14, 306)

# Degrammaticalization?

	OE	PDE
a. inflection	irregular ( <i>dearr, dorste</i> etc.)	variable ( <i>dare(s), dared</i> )
b. infinitive	without <i>to</i>	variable ( $\pm$ <i>to</i> )
c. semantics	bleaching?	no bleaching?
d. transitive use	not attested	<i>I dare you</i> etc.

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- counterexample to unidirectionality of grammaticalization (Beths 1999)
- a possible case of ‘de-auxiliarization’ (Schlüter 2010)
- development from modal to ‘marginal modal’ (Nagle 1989)
- ‘split development’ into modal and non-modal variants (Warner 1993)

# Plan for today

1. Semantic bleaching in OE
2. The development of weak morphology
3. Transitive *dare*



MS Royal 3 D VI, f. 234 (late 13th c.)  
Source: The British Library

1

## Semantic bleaching in Old English

# *Dearr* + ‘courage’ verb

- (5) *Hwa dear nu gedyrstlæcan, þæt he derige  
who dares now dare [?] that he harms.SBJ*

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‘Who would now dare to harm these people’ (Beths 1999)

DOE Corpus (ÆHomM 14, 306)

> semantic bleaching of *dare*

Beths (1999: 1081), Tomaszewska (2014: 70), Los (2015: 112)

# OE ‘courage’ verbs

	<i>with dearr</i>	meaning
<i>gedyrstlæcan</i>	3	‘presume, be (so) bold’
<i>geþristlæcan</i>	4	‘presume, be (so) bold’
<i>geneþan</i>	3	‘venture, put at stake, risk’

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<i>geneþan</i>	3	‘venture, put at stake, risk’

whereas *dearr* + INF(x)

= ‘have sufficient courage to x’

# Context: Esther 8

“Se cyning þa andwyrde þære cwene  
þus and eac Mardocheo swiðe  
mildelice: Aman ic aheng and his æhta  
þe betæhte.

Hwa dear nu gedyrstlæcan, þæt he  
derige þam folce?

Awritað nu gewritu, beþam þe ge  
willab, þæt eall beo aidlod Amanes  
sirwung ongean þam ludeiscum and him  
ne derige nan man.”

DOE Corpus (ÆHomM 14)



MS KB 78 D 38 II, f. 15v (c. 1430)

Source: Koninklijke Bibliotheek

‘The king then answered the queen and Mordecai very gracefully: “I’ve executed Haman and given you his possessions. Who now dares to be so bold that he is going to harm those people? Now write a decree, such as you see fit, so that all of Haman’s plotting against the Jews is made useless and no one will harm them.”’

# *Dearr* + ‘courage’ verb 2.0

(5") *Hwa dear nu gedyrstlæcan, þæt he derige  
who dares now be.so.bold that he harms.SBJ*

*þam folce  
that.D people.D*

‘Who now dares to be so bold/presumptuous that he is going to harm those people’

DOE Corpus (*ÆHomM* 14, 306)

> no semantic bleaching

# Another example

(6) *Forðam ic ne dorste geðristlæcan þara minra awuht*  
therefore I not dared presume the.G.PL mine.G.PL at.all  
*fela on gewrit settan, forðam me wæs uncuð,*  
many in writing put because me.D was unknown  
*hwæt þæs ðam lician wolde þe æfter us wæren*  
what it.G those.D please would who after us were.SBJ

‘I did not dare to take the liberty to write down many of my own [laws], since it was unknown to me what of it would please those that may come after us’

DOE Corpus (LawAfEl, 49.9)

# Danish *turde* vs. *vove*

(7) *Ikke mindst af den grund ville det være befriende, hvis*  
not least for that reason would it be relieving if  
*Københavns Kommune turde vove at lade nye, friske og*  
The City of Copenhagen dared risk to let new fresh and  
*forstandige arkitektøjne give hver deres bud*  
intelligent architect.eyes give each their suggestion

‘Not least because of this, it would be of relief if the City of Copenhagen  
dared to take a chance and let new, intelligent architects have a fresh look and  
each give their suggestion’

KorpusDK (2001, editorial)

# 2

## The development of weak morphology

# Preterite-present → weak verb

	OE	EModE	PDE
3SG PRES	<i>dearr</i>	<i>dare/dareth</i>	<i>dare/dares</i>
3SG PAST	<i>dorste</i>	<i>durst/dared</i>	<i>dared</i>

# Preterite-present → weak verb

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3SG PRES	<i>dearr</i>	<i>dare/dareth</i>	<i>dare/dares</i>
3SG PAST	<i>dorste</i>	<i>durst/dared</i>	<i>dared</i>

“the precursors of today’s modals from the outset shared certain features that predestined them for a separate development. Thus, all pre-modals except *wile* were preterite-present verbs”

Schlüter (2010: 292)

# Preterite-presents etymologically

PDE

*can*  
*may*  
*must*  
*shall*  
*will*  
*ought*  
(*dare*)

# Preterite-presents etymologically

PDE	OE
<i>can</i>	<i>cann</i>
<i>may</i>	<i>mæg</i>
<i>must</i>	<i>mot</i>
<i>shall</i>	<i>sceal</i>
<i>will</i>	( <i>wile</i> )
<i>ought</i>	<i>ah</i>
( <i>dare</i> )	<i>dearr</i>
	<i>þearf</i> ‘need’
	<i>deah</i> ‘avail’
	<i>ann</i> ‘grant’
	<i>wat</i> ‘know’
	<i>ge-man</i> ‘remember’
	<i>ge-neah</i> ‘suffice’

# Preterite-presents etymologically

PDE	OE	PGmc
<i>can</i>	<i>cann</i>	* <i>kann</i>
<i>may</i>	<i>mæg</i>	* <i>mag</i>
<i>must</i>	<i>mot</i>	* <i>mōt</i>
<i>shall</i>	<i>sceal</i>	* <i>skal</i>
<i>will</i>	( <i>wile</i> )	(* <i>wilī</i> )
<i>ought</i>	<i>ah</i>	* <i>aih</i>
( <i>dare</i> )	<i>dearr</i> þearf ‘need’ deah ‘avail’ ann ‘grant’ wat ‘know’ ge-man ‘remember’ ge-neah ‘suffice’	* <i>dars</i> * <i>þarf</i> * <i>daug</i> * <i>ann</i> * <i>wait</i> *( <i>ga</i> )- <i>man</i> *( <i>ga</i> )- <i>nah</i> * <i>lais</i> ‘know’ * <i>ōg</i> ‘fear’

# Preterite-presents etymologically

PDE	OE	PGmc	< PIE stative?
<i>can</i>	<i>cann</i>	* <i>kann</i>	
<i>may</i>	<i>mæg</i>	* <i>mag</i>	Randall & Jones (2015)
<i>must</i>	<i>mot</i>	* <i>mōt</i>	
<i>shall</i>	<i>sceal</i>	* <i>skal</i>	
<i>will</i>	( <i>wile</i> )	(* <i>wilī</i> )	
<i>ought</i>	<i>ah</i>	* <i>aīh</i>	
( <i>dare</i> )	<i>dearr</i> þearf ‘need’ deah ‘avail’ ann ‘grant’ wat ‘know’ ge-man ‘remember’ ge-neah ‘suffice’	* <i>dars</i> *þarf *daug *ann *wait *(ga)-man *(ga)-nah *lais ‘know’ *ōg ‘fear’	

3

Transitive *dare*

# *I dare you etc.*

- (8) These [creatures] ride in triumph, as hauing conquered the wits of Man; and still they dare them to come out of their dens of instincts, intelligences, and hidden qualities

EEBOCorp 1.0 (1619, Rous, *The arte of happiness*)

# *I dare you etc.*

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EEBOCorp 1.0 (1619, Rous, *The arte of happiness*)

**dare** (dæə). Children in quarrelling say, “I dare you,” “I dog dare you,” “I black dog dare you,” “I double dog dare you,” “I double black dog dare you.” [In Michigan *dare* and *double dare*. ]

“Kentucky Words”, *Dialect Notes I*, p.229 [1896]  
Source: The Internet Archive

# Another *dare*

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1. [dare, v.<sup>1</sup>](#) [View full entry](#)

•••••••• c1000

To have boldness or courage (*to do something*); to be so bold as.

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2. [dare, v.<sup>2</sup>](#) [View full entry](#)

•••••••• c1220

To gaze fixedly or stupidly; to stare as one terrified, amazed, or fascinated. *Obs.*

Oxford English Dictionary

- (9) *And at þat syȝt vche douth con dare*  
‘And at that sight every host did tremble’

*Pearl* (ed. Gordon 1953), l. 839

# *Dare*, transitive verb

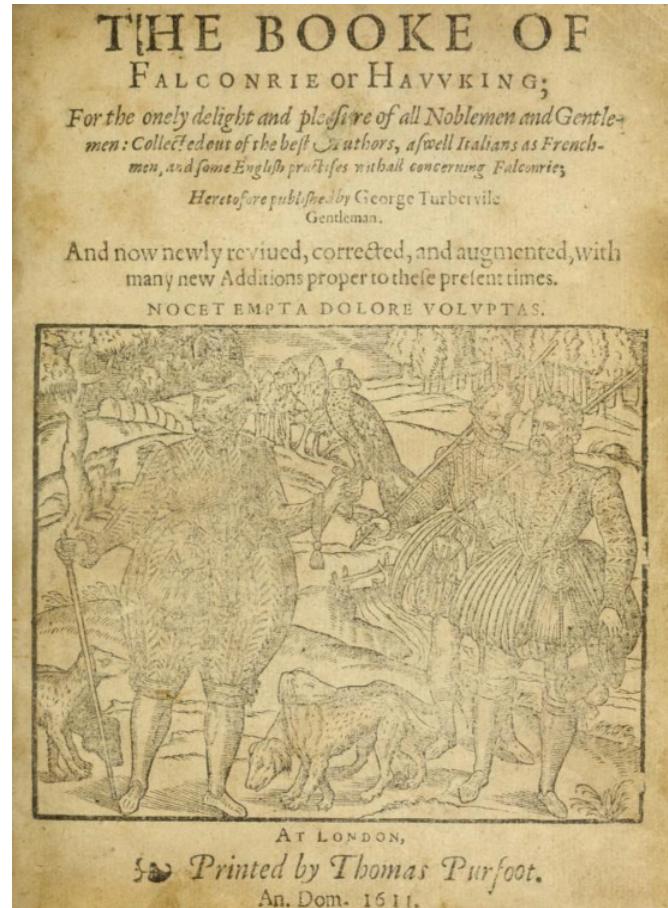
- (10) Like vnto men that dare larkes, which holde vp an hoby [falcon], that the larkes eies beyng euer vpon the hoby, shuld not see the nette that is layd on theyr heades.

1551 T. Cranmer Answer S. Gardiner 121

- (11) daring of larkes [...] a very good sporte and full of delight, to sée the fearefull nature of the silly Larke, with the great awe and subiection that the Hobbie hath her in

Turberville (1611 [1575]: 57)

Turberville 1611 [1575]  
Source: Internet Archive/Boston Public Library



# *Dare*, transitive verb



(12) Siles doun on aithire side selcuth  
knȝtis, / Sum darid, sum dede, sum  
depe wondid.

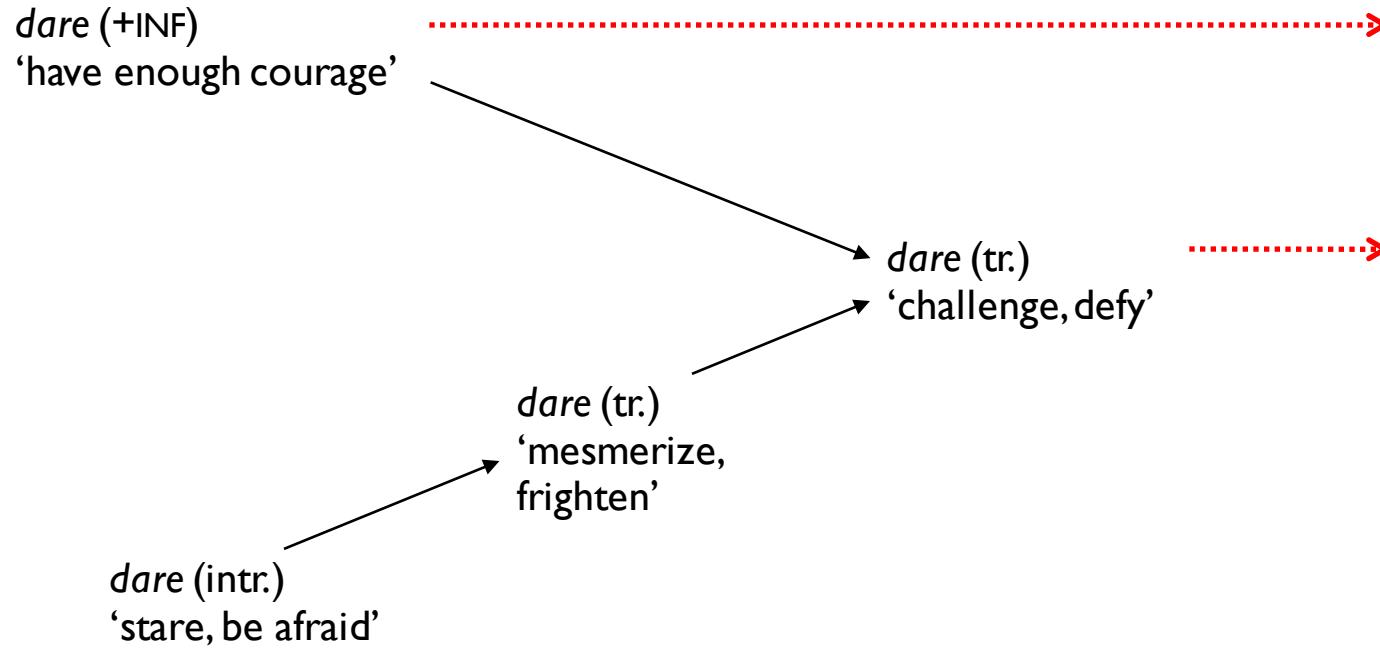
c1450(?a1400) Wars Alex.(Ashm 44) 3044

(13) For our approach shall so much  
dare the field / That England shall  
crouch down in fear and yield

Henry V, IV. ii. 34–35 (c. 1599)

Lambeth Palace Library MS. 6, f. 243 (late 15th c.)  
Source: Wikimedia Commons

# Multiple sources?



# Formal similarity

(14) Enclos'd the bush about, and there him tooke  
Like darred larke, not daring up to looke

Spenser (1805 [1596]: 199-200)

(15) to Dare, an old English word, for to stare, because they which  
behold a man stedfastly with a wide open staring eie, are said to  
bee bold or daring

Minsheu (1627: 197)

# Bridging context?

- (16) An English man hath three qualties, he can suffer no partner in his love, no straunger to be his equal, or to be dared by any

EEBOCorp 1.0 (1580, Lly, *Euphues and his England*)

- (17) Of heauen, or hell, God, or the Diuell, he earst nor heard nor carde  
Alone he sought to serue the same that would by none be darde

EEBOCorp 1.0 (1597, Warner, *Albions England*)

- (18) Hauing so godly agouernoure, and uertewes consolers, whois yeys  
cannot be darid with these manifest and open abhominacions

EEBOCorp 1.0 (1547, Hooper, *An answer...*)

# Summary

1. No bleaching in OE; *dare* distinct from other ‘courage’ verbs
  2. Preterite-present morphology in OE (and PGmc) not in itself an indication of grammatical status
  3. New transitive use in EModE actually a continuation of *dare* v.<sup>2?</sup>
- Formal changes to *dare*, but hardly from more to less grammatical status

# Open questions

1. Can we get closer to a semantic profile of the other OE ‘courage’ verbs? Why did they all disappear in ME?
2. How and why did the non-modal preterite-presents disappear from English?
3. How can one back up a hypothesis like the transitive *dare* one? Is it even possible?

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# Thank you!

Cod. Pal. germ. 848, f. 7r (early 14th c.)  
Source: Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg



# Early non-auxiliary instance?

Ne dear ich þt ha deopluker ne witerluker schriue hire  
not dare I that she deeply.COMP nor openly.COMP confess REFL

to ȝeung Preost her abuten  
to young priest here-about

‘I dare not that she makes confession more deeply or openly to a young priest about this’

PPCME2: CMANCRIW-2,II.255.148  
Cotton MS. Cleopatra C vi. (early 13<sup>th</sup> c.)

# *Geþristlæcan*

- (a) þa sæde he him, þæt on þære ylcan nyhte, þe he se ærendraca him æfter asended wæs, se healica papa wearð þurh nihtlice gesihþe on swefne swiðe gebreged, hu he dorste geþristlæcean, þæt he hete þone Godes man swencean & him to gelangian. (GD I (H), 192)
- (b) Ne sy nan sacerdhades man ne læwedes hades þe ma þe durre geþristlæcan þæt aðer oððe calic oððe disc oððe ænig þara fata þe to godcundum bigonge gehalgod bið to ænigum woruldþinge do. (ThCap I (Sauer), 57)
- (c) þa sona swa þæt ongæton ealle þa Langbearde, þe on ðam lande wæron, hi ne dorston ofer þæt geþrystlæcan, þæt hi ohte grettan þa halgan stowe rihtgeleaffullra manna. (GDPref and 3 (C), 622)

# *Gedyrstlæcan*

- (a) Witodlice þa lareowas þe us lar of com, hi bododan þam hæðenum and þam hetelum ehterum, and heora lif sealdon for Godes geleafan; ac we ne durran nu to þam gedyrstlæcan, þæt we Cristenum cyninge oððe Cristenum folce Godes beboda and Godes willan secgan.  
(ÆHom 19, 183)
- (b) He genam þone cniht be þam loccum & eft mid færlicum ryne gecyrde. & þa sona swa he þæt land gehran, he wæs cyrrende to him sylfum & on bæc beseah. & þa forþon þe he ongæt, þæt he ne mihte ne ne dorste to þon gedyrstlæcan, þæt he swa ferde, gif he hit wiste, he wæs wundriende þa wisan & aforhtode & þa cyrde to þam fædær & gesæde þa wisan him swa gedone. (GD 2 (C), 7.115)

# *Geneðan*

- (a) [Unferð] ... Selfa ne dorste under yða gewin aldre geneþan, drihtscype dreogan; þær he dome forleas, <ellenmærðum> (Beo, 418)
- (b) Nænig þæt dorste deor geneþan swæsra gesiða, nefne sinfrea, þæt hire an dæges eagum starede (Beo, 543)
- (c) On þæm dagum wæs swa micel ege from Ðæm wifmonnum, þætte Europe ne Asiam ne ealle þa neahþeoda ne mehton aþencean ne acræftan hu hi him wiðstondan mehten, ær þon hie gecuron Ercol þone ent þæt he hie sceolde mid eallum Creca cræftum beswican. & þeah ne dorste he geneðan þæt he hie mid firde gefore, ær he ongan mid Creca scipun þe mon dulmunus hætt, þe mon sægð þæt on an scip mæge an þusend manna (Or I, 10.30)